sojourners

August 2014 | sojo.net

Faith in Action for Social Justice

RIGGED

Wealth inequality is no game. The richest 400 people in the U.S. have more wealth than half of all Americans combined. Can democracy survive such disparity?

by **JULIE POLTER**

PLUS:

Walter Wink's legacy

Bride kidnapping

Housing First

Bad News Club

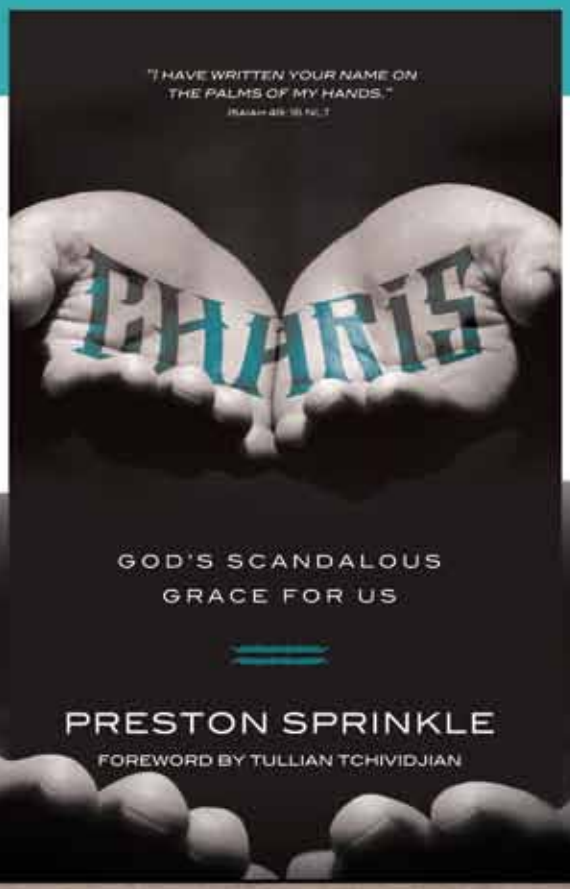
74678 08

0 56698 74678 2

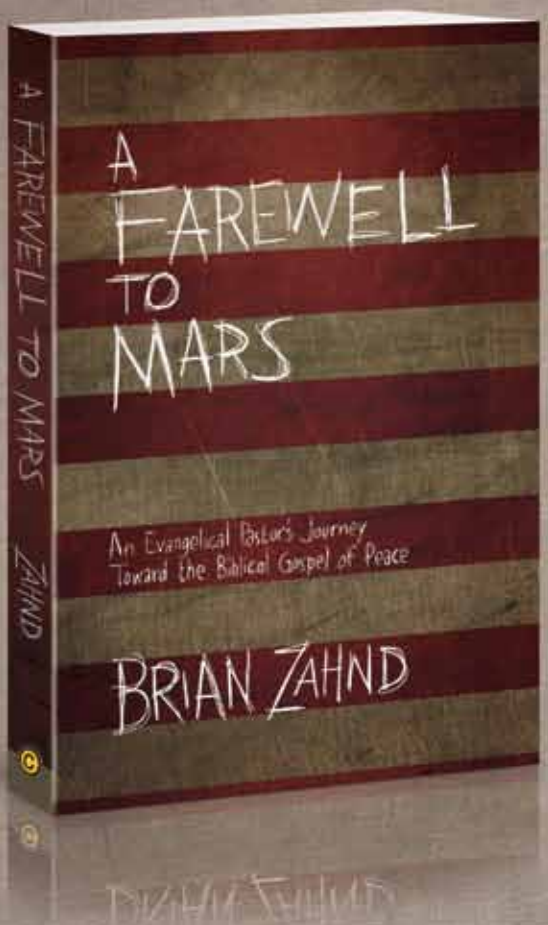
U.S./Can. $4.95

God Doesn't Just Love Us... He Even Likes Us

When you think of the Old Testament, do you think of judgment? Most people do. Yet the Old Testament actually bleeds grace!



In *Charis*, discover how really bad people receive really good things from a Creator who stubbornly delights in undelightful people...like us. It will radically transform how you see grace...and God.



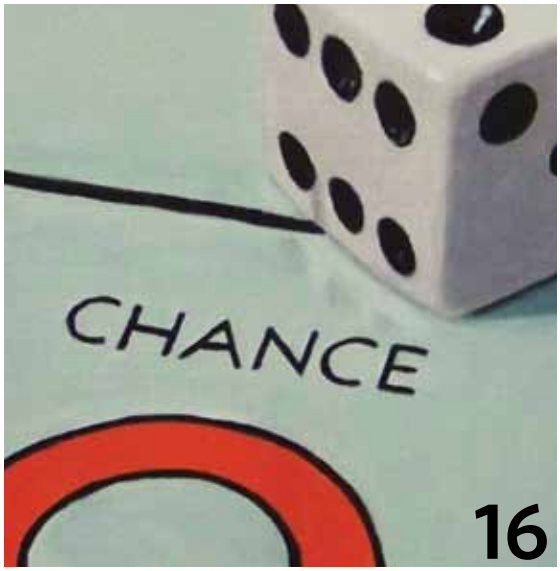
Standing up for Peace in an age of War

What does it mean to be peacemakers in the world today? What do the scriptures have to say to us about violence and vengeance?

Author Brian Zahnd calls on the Christian community to embrace the teachings of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Available in print and digital editions wherever books are sold.

David C Cook
transforming lives together



Cover painting by John A. Clapp (jclappart.com)

contents

AUGUST 2014 Vol. 43 | No. 8

COVER

16 The Rich Get Richer
The gap between the wealthiest few and the rest of us is huge—and a threat to democracy.
by Julie Polter

FEATURES

22 The Play's the Thing
How community theater helped change a tradition of "bride kidnapping" in the country of Georgia.
by Doris Bartel

26 Turning Toward Home
Once abandoned, the Bell Building now offers "housing first"—and hope—to Detroit's homeless.
by Angie Schmitt

30 'We Are Not an Island'
The Gullah/Geechee Nation battles corporate encroachment, environmental racism, and climate change.
by Queen Quet, as told to Onleilove Alston

34 'Get Them When They're Young!'
Teaching hellfire and damnation, Child Evangelism Fellowship runs "Good News Clubs" in public schools.
by Asra Q. Nomani

CULTURE WATCH

38 The legacy of Walter Wink
Reviews: *Tea Party Catholic; Faith-Rooted Organizing; Thermonuclear Monarchy*

40 Eyes & Ears, by Danny Duncan Collum

41 On Film, by Gareth Higgins

COMMENTARY

8 War on Poverty

9 Faith relations in Nigeria

10 Police killings

DEPARTMENTS

5 Letters

47 Poetry

48 Living the Word
by Min-Ah Cho

COLUMNS

7 Hearts & Minds
by Jim Wallis

12 Moving Mountains
by Lisa Sharon Harper

14 Grain of Salt
by Jim Rice

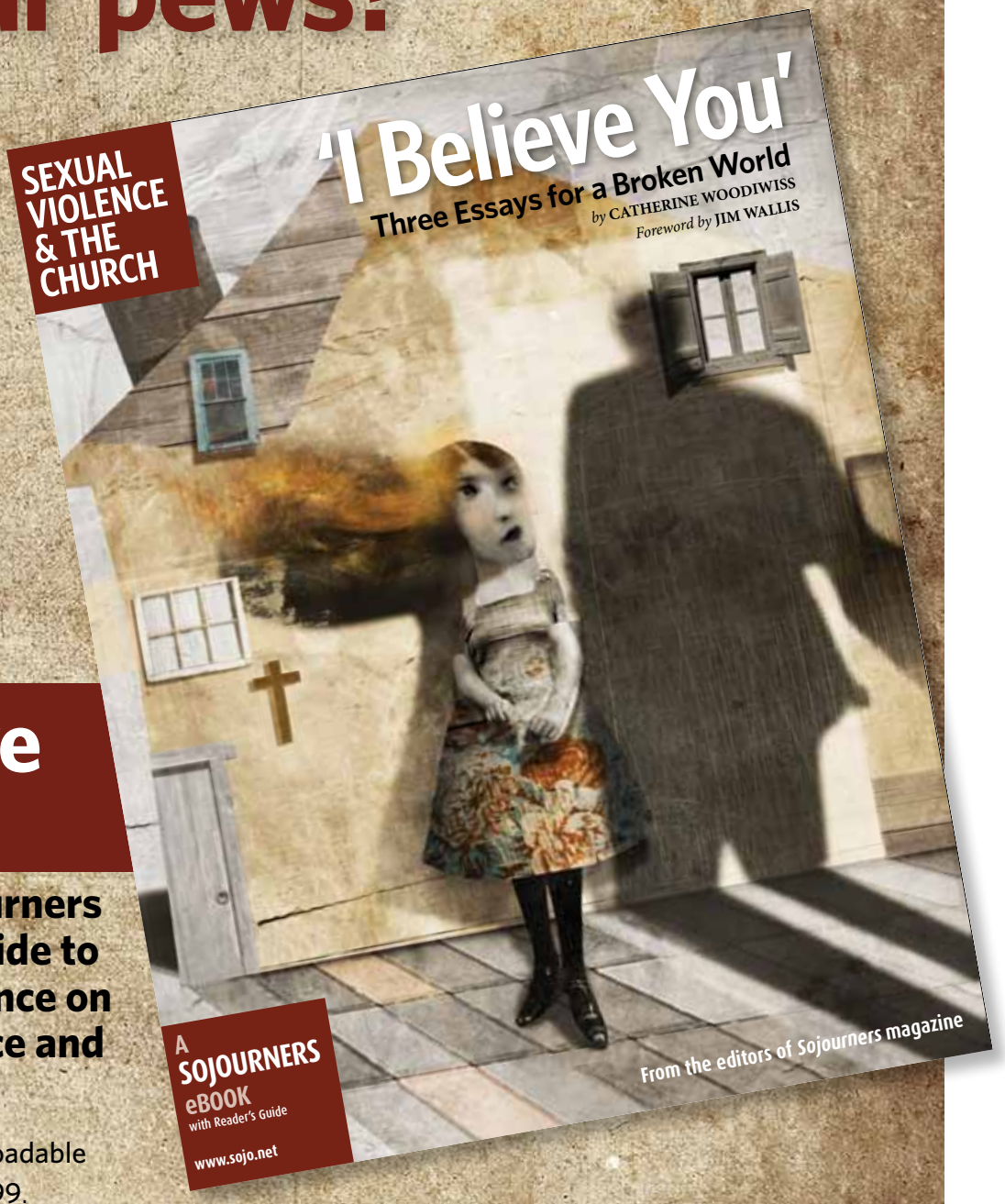
46 Deep Economy
by Bill McKibben

50 H'rumphs
by Ed Spivey Jr.

1 in 5 women in the U.S. are raped in their lifetime.

—2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey

Is a survivor sitting in your pews?



'I Believe You'

is a new Sojourners discussion guide to break the silence on sexual violence and the church.

Available as a downloadable PDF or eBook for $9.99.
sojo.net/store

ON A CHURCH retreat last fall, Doris Bartel told *Sojourners* editor Jim Rice an intriguing story about bride kidnapping in rural parts of the Eurasian country of Georgia.

Bartel—senior director for gender and empowerment for CARE, which works on gender-based violence and other issues in countries around the world—told Rice about one of her early visits to the tiny village of Natanebi, on the far western edge of Georgia, near the Black Sea. When she first met the teenagers of the village, they were very shy. "In fact," Bartel said, "they had squished themselves into a corner of the room together like a pile of puppies, giggling and pushing to get to the back and avoiding eye contact with us." They were the "good kids," she said, who had agreed to a meeting they didn't really want. The teenagers who had not come were a few hundred yards away, smoking and acting as cool as James Dean under the tallest tree in the village.

As her group worked with local activists to analyze the culture of influence among the youth of the area, they realized that the "cool boys"—the James Dean types—had a huge influence on how youth, as a group, thought and acted. And as they pondered how to reach that group—and begin to address centuries-old attitudes toward women and girls—they came to see that a surprising answer was found in Georgia's rich tradition of music, dance, and other performing arts. In this issue, Bartel tells the encouraging story of how community theater and narrative storytelling helped a village talk about age-old traditions in new ways—and begin the difficult process of change. ■

Letters

ON THE WRONG SIDE

Randall Balmer ("Losing My Religion," June 2014) offers valuable insight on the union between Christian fundamentalists and the Republican Party. It is little wonder that the underlying issue that galvanized the modern Religious Right was its opposition to anti-discrimination and desegregation laws. Throughout American history Christian fundamentalists have often been on the wrong side of social issues, especially in regard to racial injustices that are rooted in Southern fundamentalists supporting slavery and misusing the scriptures to justify their prejudice.

As a freshman years ago at a conservative Christian liberal arts college, I leaned toward voting for George McGovern because of his commitment to social justice, but was wary about the reaction from my friends and family who habitually voted Republican. My final decision was solidified by the actions of a classmate, who too was the son of a conservative evangelical preacher, when he set up a table in support of Sen. McGovern. His actions confirmed that it was "okay" for a Christian to vote Democratic. Thank you, Mr. Balmer, for your continued leadership, and thank you for being that guy at the table.

Richard W. Jones
Hagerstown, Maryland

"Christian fundamentalists have often been on the wrong side of social issues."

NUCLEAR MOTIVES?

Cardinal Theodore McCarrick ("A New Relationship with Iran," May 2014) gave a well-reasoned justification for giving diplomacy with Iran a chance to succeed. Any final deal on both enhanced inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency and lifting economic and trade sanctions will require the approval of Congress. In the past, some members of Congress have preferred to add sanctions, not remove them.

Like many other nations, Iran has been slowly shifting away from hydrocarbon fuels to alternatives for generating electricity—geothermal, nuclear, solar, and wind energy. From the beginning, the sanctions showed the Iranians that for them to have reliable nuclear power plants, they needed to make their own enriched uranium fuel.

Unfortunately, many legislators and their constituents do not understand why the Iranians insist on enriching uranium-235, as it is seldom discussed in the American media. Fortunately, the Iranians have launched a new website (www.nuclearenergy.ir) that explains their motives. This citizen plans to keep reminding my representative and senators to study it.

Bill Buckel
Columbus, Ohio

WATERSHED DISCIPLESHIP

Ched Myers' excellent article ("A Watershed Moment," May 2014) is thought-provoking. His call for Christian discipleship in the face of ecological decline calls to mind the thought of liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, and other eco-theologians as well, who view our earthen mission in light of the Holy Trinity as "life, love, and communion."

In the face of a rampant decrease in ecological resources, increased risk of species extinction, and all-too frequent natural disasters, is it too much to ask all of creation to return to the source? When we reflect upon our creaturely dependence upon God for our gifts and resources, we can clearly see that our actions matter. In fact, all things matter, and we need to act accordingly for the next generations to live in abundance.

Robert P. Russo
Perrysburg, Ohio

Correction

A photo caption in our June 2014 issue identified a church visited by Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter during the 1976 election as Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Ga. The church was actually Plains Baptist Church.

Get the last word. *Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, Sojourners, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.*

sojourners

President/Editor-in-Chief, Jim Wallis
Chief Executive Officer, Robert Wilson-Black
Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, Michael Norman
Vice President, Human Resources, Karen L. Lattea

Editor, Jim Rice
Art Director, Ed Spivey Jr.
Senior Associate Editors, Rose Marie Berger, Julie Polter
Associate Editors, Elizabeth Palmberg, Duane Shank
Assistant Editor, Elaina Ramsey

Director of Marketing, Cynthia J. Martens
Director of Advertising Sales, Sandra Sims
Director of Special Projects and Resources, Sondra Haaga
Advertising Sales Associates, Stacey Schwenker, Katie Zimmerman

Chief Advancement Officer, Larisa Friesen Hall
Senior Director of Foundation Relations and Performance Officer, Lisa Daughtry-Weiss
Director of Individual Giving, Katie Chatelaine-Samsen
Director of Major Gifts, Kaitlin Hasseler
Donor Services Manager, Erika Jackson-Stokes
Manager of Planned Giving and Research, Brandon Baird

Web Editor and Director of Online Media, Sandi Villarreal
Director of Web and Digital Technology, Bob Sabath
Associate Web Editor, Catherine Woodiwiss
Web and Multimedia Associate, Brandon Hook
Online Organizing Associate, Janelle Tupper

Chief Strategy Officer, Tim King
Senior Director of Mobilizing, Lisa Sharon Harper
Senior Director of Advocacy, Beau Underwood
Press Secretary, Juliet Vedral
Immigration Campaign Associate, Ivone Guillen
Creation Care Campaign Associate, Liz Schmitt

Accountant, Brion Thomas
Intern Program Director, Elizabeth Denlinger Reaves
Senior Executive Assistant, George Lee
Office Manager, Simon Oh
Assistant to the President, J.K. Granberg-Michaelson

Interns: Jessica Breslin, *Mobilizing*; Sophia Har, *Advertising*; Ryan Herring, *Marketing and Circulation*; Rebecca Kraybill, *Editorial*; Joey Longley, *Communications*; Danny Mortensen, *Resources*; Emily Peterson, *Donor Services*; Kevin Sakaguchi, *Executive*; Ben Sutter, *Online*

Contributing Editors: Diana Butler Bass, Daniel Berrigan, Melvin Bray, Walter Brueggemann, Majora Carter, Joan Chittister, Eugene Cho, Shane Claiborne, Danny Duncan Collum, Edwidge Danticat, Marie Dennis, John DiIulio, E.J. Dionne Jr., Valerie Elverton Dixon, Reta Halteman Finger, Wes Granberg-Michaelson, David P. Gushee, Adam Hamilton, Vincent Harding (1931-2014), Obery Hendricks, Gareth Higgins, Joel Hunter, Lynne Hybels, Daisy Khan, Anne Lamott, Bill McKibben, Brian McLaren, Donald Miller, Ched Myers, Eboo Patel, John Perkins, Samuel Rodriguez, Richard Rohr, Ron Sider, Barbara Brown Taylor, Cornel West, Lauren Winner, Valerie Weaver-Zercher, Tyler Wigg Stevenson, Bill Wylie-Kellermann

Contributing Writers: Onleilove Alston, Frida Berrigan, Michaela Bruzzese, Kimberly Burge, Judy Coode, David Cortright, Aaron McCarroll Gallegos, Bob Hulteen, Celeste Kennel-Shank, Jesse Nathan, Brittany Shoot, Glen Stassen (1936-2014), Andrew Wilkes, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Tobias Winright, Kari Jo Verhulst

Sojourners magazine (ISSN 0364-2097) is published monthly, except September-October is combined, at 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. Periodicals Postage Paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Canadian Publications Sales Agreement #257494. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856.

Sojourners Online: www.sojo.net • @sojourners
Get free email updates at sojo.net/email_subscription.

Retirement with an impact

Save for retirement while also helping others, with an **Advantage Select High Impact Annuity** from Everence. With competitive rates, you can save for the future – and help congregations and nonprofit organizations build up their communities through church loans from Everence. It's another way we are **doing better together.**

Learn more! Visit everence.com, call (800) 348-7468 or talk to an Everence representative.

Everence

The 2014 Lansing Lee Conference
welcomes
Dr. Eben Alexander
New York Times best-selling author of
Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife
October 26-28 at Kanuga

This three-day event will explore the ways God reaches across time and space to meet us and how this connection shapes and transforms our lives. Celebrate the transcendent power of God's love with powerful story, great worship and creative experiences in the beauty of autumn in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

KANUGA
Hendersonville, NC

Learn more at kanuga.org/lansinglee

BY JIM WALLIS

Remembering 'Uncle Vincent'

I SAT MY two boys down the night I got the call and heard the news. "Uncle Vincent has died and passed on," I told 15-year-old Luke and 11-year-old Jack.

I could see the sadness in their faces. Vincent Harding had been like an uncle to them, an elder and mentor to me, a formative retreat leader for the Sojourners community, and one of the most insightful commentators and historians of the true meaning of the civil rights movement and Martin Luther King Jr.

Dr. Harding and Dr. King were friends. Vincent and his wife, Rosemarie, were part of the inner circle of the Southern freedom movement, and Harding wrote the historic speech that King delivered at Riverside Church in New York City on April 4, 1967, where he came out against the war in Vietnam and identified the "giant triplets" of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism.

Vincent's warmth lifted the temperatures of those around him.

That speech was perhaps King's most provocative and prophetic address. It reflected King's heart and mind, and went further than he had gone before in challenging foundational and systemic wrongs in U.S. life and history and not merely calling for racial integration. This King—particularly in his thinking and writing from 1964 and the passage of the Civil Rights Act until 1968, the year of his assassination—was a King perhaps best understood by his speechwriter that day, Vincent Harding.

That's what Vincent always did for us all: asked us to go deeper into our faith.

My boys have vivid memories, which we talked about on the night of Vincent's death, of a bitterly cold January day in early 2009 when the country inaugurated its first African-American president. Barack Obama represented the dramatic changes occurring in U.S. life regarding who would constitute the next America—a majority of minorities. In his late 70s, Vincent had come from his home in Denver to be present for the inauguration which drew nearly 2 million people. I remember his health wasn't so good at the time, and the weather was unbelievably cold. But I had helped get Vincent tickets to attend President Obama's inauguration, and he was determined to accompany our family on that cold day. Vincent had a warmth in his heart and face that lifted the temperatures of all those around him.

Vincent Harding

Ryan Rodrick Beiler

What an amazing gift, to have your two boys watching the celebration—more than just the inauguration—of the first black president, accompanied by the whispered commentary of Vincent Harding. Vincent was a leading historian of the civil rights movement and a participant in those extraordinary events—and someone who could tell my children how Martin Luther King might have felt about this day.

To be with Vincent, as I was blessed to be so many times, was to never feel alone. It wasn't just his personal presence, but the way he would sweep you up into that community of faith that goes back so far and still points us to the future. Vincent would help you to know them as well as him. "To know them, to know that they are present," said Vincent Harding, "is to know that regardless of how alone we feel sometimes, we are never alone. We are never alone: nowhere, nohow, in nothing. Never."

Years ago, Vincent and Rosemarie wrote an essay in *Sojourners* on the "many faces of hope." In it, they wrote: "When we hear the ancient testimony, 'Our hope is in God,' we know what that means. We have seen and heard and felt that God's hope has come into our lives through God's children, especially those who have lived, worked, prevailed, died, and lived on in the midst of magnificent struggles to create and receive a new life, a new community, a new hope."

They continued, "Indeed, hope urges us forward, and we go. Bearing the blessings of the past, anticipating the revolutionary, humanizing transformation of these United States and of our own needy lives, we move forward toward the dawn with all who dare to hope, with all who see God in the faces of the human family."

Thank you, Vincent. You have passed, but your spirit will always endure with my family and with the many people you brought into the family of the faithful. You have been such a blessing to us and will remain with us in the days ahead. As Joy, my boys, and I look forward to the future, we will always be blessed to have you standing at our side, whispering the things we should remember. ■

***Jim Wallis** is editor-in-chief of* Sojourners *magazine.*

Ryan Rodrick Beiler

Enemy Trees?

Daoud Nassar surveys the Tent of Nations land where the Israeli military bulldozed more than 1,500 mature fruit trees and grapevines in May at the internationally recognized Christian peace project near the West Bank town of Bethlehem. "I got many emails from Jewish people and Israeli people who are very shocked to hear this," said Nassar, a Palestinian Christian whose family owns the land. "They said also that when you start planting new trees, we are ready to come and help you." The Nassar property is surrounded by Israeli settlements, all of which are illegal under international law.

By Duane Shank

No Short or Easy Struggle

Fifty years later, does the political will exist to win the "War on Poverty"?

FIFTY YEARS AGO, on Aug. 20, 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act into law. It had already been a momentous year. The Civil Rights Act was signed in early July, ending legal segregation. Mississippi Freedom Summer was underway, with hundreds of volunteers joining in voter registration campaigns. The effort to overcome poverty was the next step toward economic empowerment.

The Act created 11 different programs, including the Job Corps, Neighborhood Youth Corps, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), and both rural and urban Community Action Programs. Collectively referred to as the "War on Poverty," the programs were coordinated by the Office of Economic Opportunity. In 1965, Medicaid and Medicare were created to provide health insurance for people in poverty and the elderly, and Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provided funding to school districts with students in poverty. It was the most comprehensive package of social legislation since the New Deal.

Results of the programs have been mixed, with the most striking gains for older Americans. According to a special report from *U.S. News & World Report*, "While the national poverty rate has ultimately fallen by 4 points since 1964, when the War on Poverty began, from 19.0 in 1964 to 15.0 percent in 2012, the poverty rate for people over 65 has plummeted by more than two-thirds, from 28.5 percent in 1966 to 9.1 percent in 2012." But with the poverty rate still at 15 percent—46.5 million people in the country currently live below the poverty line—where do we go from here?

> "The richest nation on earth can afford to win it."

We are still in a period of high unemployment, and wage growth is stagnant for many of those who are able to find work. Issues of a living wage, child care, and disintegrating communities continue to need attention. Our economy is rapidly becoming more unequal, with a staggering concentration of wealth held by the very few at the top. All of these factors work against a serious effort to overcome poverty.

Politically, the mood is toward shrinking federal budgets rather than providing needed resources, and military expenditures continue to take the lion's share of what is available. The National Priorities Project estimates that the cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to date is approximately $1.5 trillion, with an additional $750 million for Homeland Security.

It brings a strong sense of déjà vu. By 1967, only two years after the start of the

War on Poverty, Martin Luther King Jr. observed, "A few years ago there was a shining moment—as if there was a real promise of hope for the poor—both black and white—through the poverty program. There were experiments, hopes, new beginnings. Then came the buildup in Vietnam, and I watched this program broken and eviscerated, as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war, and I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw [people] and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube."

Poverty doesn't have to exist. Nearly 10 years ago, the faith-based antipoverty network Call to Renewal issued its "Covenant to Overcome Poverty." The central proposal was that "Those who work responsibly should have a living family income in which a combination of a family's earnings and supports for transportation, health care, nutrition, child care, education, housing, and other basic needs together provide a decent standard of living." That remains the core of a solution.

But the question now, as then, is whether the political will exists. In his 1964 State of the Union message, President Johnson said, "This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America. ... It will not be a short or easy struggle, no single weapon or strategy will suffice, but we shall not rest until that war is won. The richest nation on earth can afford to win it. We cannot afford to lose it."

Where is that will today? Fifty years later, the nation still waits for the war on poverty to be won. ■

Duane Shank *is an associate editor of* Sojourners.

By Gopar Tapkida

The Momentum of Peace

Christians and Muslims in Nigeria support interfaith efforts for reconciliation.

THE VIOLENCE AND kidnappings in Nigeria are more than a religious conflict: They are a political manipulation of religion.

Before the 2011 Nigerian election, northern politicians (who are mostly Muslims) threatened to make the country ungovernable if Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the south, became president. Jonathan was vice-president for Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, a Muslim from the north, who died before completing his eight-year term. Jonathan assumed power after Yar'Adua's death, as is allowed by the constitution. However, northern Muslims claimed that since Yar'Adua did not finish his term, they should be allowed to place someone of their own choosing in power. Jonathan's refusal angered the north.

In response, the Muslim terrorist organization Boko Haram began intensifying its attack on Jonathan's rule in order to discredit his presidency and his pursuit of the 2015 election. If Boko Haram succeeds in pushing Jonathan out, southern militia groups are likely to commence their own violent campaign. These terrorists are trying to manipulate people by making them think that it is a religious fight, when in reality it is about political power.

People, however, are beginning to reject the violence. In April, as the world is well aware, Boko Haram kidnapped more than 200 schoolgirls from Chibok, a community that is said to be about 90 percent Christian. The outcry of rage and pain about this incident transcended religious lines. In a May market bombing in the city of Jos, both Christians and Muslims lost their lives. After the bombings, Muslims and Christians on the streets of Jos tried to work together in finding a way through the situation. People no longer want to fight and are starting to value peacebuilding and interfaith efforts. This is a sign of hope.

There are many peacebuilding activities happening in Nigeria, and all over Africa, that were not present in years past. Awareness has been created by likeminded Christians and Muslims working together for peace.

One example I've worked with is the Emergency Preparedness Response Team that uses text messages to confer with each other about possible threats and rumors of

sojourners

Our Mission
The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

Business and Editorial Address
Please send all business and editorial correspondence to Sojourners, 3333 14th Street NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010.

Subscription and Change of Address
SUBSCRIBERS: Visit sojo.net/subscribe to manage your subscription or print change of address on a card with old address label attached; send all subscription correspondence and address changes (except countries listed below) to Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856, call 1-800-678-9691, or email us at sojourners@cambeywest.com (allow six weeks to process any address change).
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856.

Subscription Rates
U.S.: $39.95 one year print (for first-class mail, $50). Digital subscriptions to *Sojourners* are available for $19.95 (free to print subscribers) at sojo.net/subscribe. **Australia:** $78 one year (via air mail, paid in Australian currency, and sent to MediaCom, PO Box 610, Unley 5061 SA). **New Zealand:** $97 one year (via air mail, paid in New Zealand currency, and sent to MediaCom, PO Box 9483, Wellington, NZ); email admin@mediacom.org.au. **All other foreign surface** (six to eight weeks delivery overseas): $49.95 one year. **All other air service overseas** (one to two weeks delivery): $59.95 one year. Except where noted, payable in U.S. currency.

Newsstand Circulation
Newsstand circulation through Disticor Magazine Distribution Services. For more information, call (905) 619-6565, fax (905) 619-2903, or email mraucci@disticor.com.

Advertising
Advertisement in *Sojourners* does not imply editorial endorsement. For information on display advertising in *Sojourners,* please write to: Advertising, Sojourners, 3333 14th Street NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010; advertising@sojo.net; or visit www.sojo.net.

Submissions
Please direct poetry to the Poetry Editor (postal mail only, address below); books, music, and reviews to the Review Editor by post or at reviews@sojo.net; and query letters (400 words or fewer) for all other suggested articles to the Manuscript Editor by post or at queries@sojo.net. No submissions will be returned. Full writer's guidelines: sojo.net/writers.

Printed in the U.S.A. on recycled paper.

All content copyright ©2014 Sojourners
3333 14th Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20010
Phone (202) 328-8842

From the Archives

July-August 1998

Football Racism

A GROUP of Native Americans appeared before the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board to argue that "Redskins," the name of Washington, D.C.'s football team, is racist and not deserving of federal trademark protection. Federal law states that a company name may not be "scandalous" or "disparaging." ...

Offering an opinion is Chief Billy Redwing Tayac of the Piscataway Indian Nation, a Native American people who have been in the Washington area for roughly 10,000 years longer than the football team.

"'Redskins' is a racial slur," Chief Tayac said. "The term has only continued to be acceptable because native people have been decimated and don't have the political or economic clout to stop it. One only has to look at the origin of the term 'redskins' to see that it is not neutral. When [Europeans] first came to our country, a bounty was offered on Indians, and the dead were brought in by the wagonload. But that got to be a problem, so they started asking for just the scalps of Indians. Just like the hide of a deer is called a 'deerskin,' and the hide of a beaver is called a 'beaverskin,' the scalp of an Indian was called a 'redskin.'

"People want to see us riding horses and living in tepees, but Indians are modern people and we want the same respect that has been applied to other peoples. We are men and women—not animals." ■

Aaron McCarroll Gallegos *was assistant editor of* Sojourners *when this article appeared.*

attacks. These text messages help diffuse rumors and prevent preemptive strikes from either side.

The program does trainings based on principles and techniques taught in the conflict transformation program at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va. Most of the participants who come to the trainings are younger people of both Muslim and Christian faith. The participants enter into the trainings with a lot of excitement, zeal, and tension associated with the current unrest. Through the trainings, they are often transformed from a position of violence to a position of nonviolence. Participants grow in understanding that both Christians and Muslims are victims, and that in order for peace to succeed they must enter into open dialogue with one another.

Support for interfaith efforts for peace and reconciliation is growing. Sometimes the Christians and Muslims who participate in the workshops deliver relief matériel to recent victims of violence. They also sometimes go together to clean the outside of a mosque or church to show support and unity with one another. We laid the foundation for peace work by hosting workshops and trainings. Now others are carrying the mantle.

In Nigeria, religious manipulation is widespread, but it is lessening as more people become aware that violence is destroying their lives and livelihoods. Both Christians and Muslims are coming out strongly to condemn acts of bombing and kidnapping and to support interfaith efforts. We have to sustain the momentum of peace. ■

Gopar Tapkida *and his wife, Monica, are Mennonite Central Committee representatives in Zimbabwe. Tapkida, a native Nigerian, served for six years as MCC regional peace adviser for West and Central Africa and is a graduate of the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University.*

By Ruby Sales and Susan Smith

A National Shame

Police killing of black people is not a black problem. It is an American problem.

AFRICAN AMERICANS around the country are finding it is dangerous to call 911. Jack Lamar Roberson's family in Waycross, Ga., discovered this the hard way when they placed an urgent call to 911 in October 2013 because his fiancée thought that he had taken an overdose of diabetes medicine.

Instead of sending EMTs, the dispatcher sent the police. Within 20 seconds of being in the house, police shot Roberson nine times, with bullets striking his back, arms, chest, and head as he held his arms up in the air. Although he was a veteran, he did not die from bullet wounds at the hands of strangers in a foreign land. Instead, white police gunned him down in his home.

Killings like this—which could be called anti-black hate crimes by police—are far too common. "Operation Ghetto Storm," a 2012 report by the Malcolm X Grassroots Project, revealed that white police officers, security guards, or vigilantes kill an unarmed black man, woman, or child every 28 hours in the U.S. In 2012, police officers shot 57 people in Chicago—50 were black, two were white. Miami police officers killed seven black men within eight months in 2011. The Houston-based *African-American News & Issues* headlined an article this spring: "Open Season on Blacks in Texas: Cops Are Shooting First & Not Asking Questions."

These police killings of black people emerge out of a culture and system of white supremacy. In such a context, police killing of black people is not a black problem. It is an American problem that shreds the curtains of democracy.

Far too many people deny the place of race in these incidents. Instead, they accuse advocates for racial justice of playing the race card. Rather than coming face to face with the soil that breeds these crimes, these detractors blame or slander the victims—or they simply shift their gaze away from these deaths.

IN AUGUST 1965, when I (Ruby) was 17, I was arrested as part of demonstrations in Lowndes County, Ala., in the Southern

freedom movement. After being released from jail in Hayneville, Ala., I walked with three other protesters to buy a soda at the Cash Grocery Store down the street. A volunteer "special deputy sheriff" named Tom Coleman stood at the steps of the store, holding a shotgun. When he aimed it at me,

Police officers, security guards, or vigilantes kill an unarmed black man, woman, or child every 28 hours.

Jonathan Daniels, an Episcopal seminarian from Keene, N.H., pushed me aside and took the shotgun blast intended for me.

Daniels' murderer—a man trying to kill an unarmed teenage girl—was acquitted by an all-white jury. Even the Alabama attorney general at the time described the verdict as the "democratic process going down the drain of irrationality, bigotry, and improper law enforcement."

On that awful day almost 50 years ago, I was a teenager, black, and female in a segregated society that perceived me as disposable waste. Today, I have the faith, power, and connections to move the mountain of racial hatred that drives the same state-sanctioned murder that killed Jonathan and many other people during the long and bloody history of segregation.

The good news is that we are all valued children of God. Our question for today is, "What does it mean to be church in the 21st century when too many of our black brothers and sisters are still seen as disposable waste?" This question inspires a different conversation about what it means to build a beloved community while advancing democracy. When we interrogate these issues, we change the way we talk and act in the world. ■

__Ruby Sales__ is founder and director and __Susan Smith__ is former Gordon Cosby Seasoned Voices Fellow at the SpiritHouse Project, which works to stop racist crimes against African Americans and to build multicultural coalitions to contest racism.

The Uncommon Tour

RACE • POVERTY • INEQUALITY

Inequality has been called the defining issue of our times. Let Sojourners help your church or campus go deeper in its understanding of biblical equality and its implications for race and poverty in our world.

Lisa Sharon Harper offers inspiring theological foundations for biblical equality and informative content on the intersection of poverty and race in the U.S. Providing hands-on organizing, advocacy, and media training, Harper and other Sojourners staff members will help motivate your congregation or students to work toward a more just and peaceful world.

This training is shaped and guided in every way by our commitment to follow the teachings of Jesus and designed to enable people of faith to contribute their unique gifts to the broader movement of justice.

Sojourners is now offering one-, two-, and three-day Uncommon Tour events for groups and budgets of every size. Limited dates are available. To book a 2014 date or get more information, email us at **uncommontour@sojo.net.**

A RACE & POVERTY INITIATIVE FROM sojourners

BY LISA SHARON HARPER

What Moves Mountains?

LOVE. THAT'S WHAT moves mountains. That's what the inimitable Dr. Maya Angelou shared with Oprah Winfrey in an interview a year before Angelou's passing on May 28, 2014, at the age of 86.

In the days following her death, tributes blanketed the television and internet. Perhaps the greatest came on Sunday evening, June 1, as Oprah Winfrey aired a series of exclusive interviews with Dr. Angelou. Thus, the prophet spoke from the grave and this is what she said: "Love moves mountains."

Jesus said faith moves mountains—faith the size of a mustard seed (Matthew 17:20). Did Dr. Maya Angelou dare to contradict Jesus? The poet/prophet says love. Jesus said faith. Which is it? Perhaps both.

People of faith know—they have witnessed it. Faith does move mountains. But they also know this: Faith's power can lay dormant until it's set ablaze by love. Perhaps only love has the power to fortify faith enough to make the earth quake.

Anger can shake earth, but it cannot move it. Rage can break earth, but it cannot move it. What if faith the size of a mustard seed requires the force of love to move the mountain? If that is the case, we are left with one haunting question: Why have we seen so few mountains move in our lifetime?

Reuters

Maya Angelou in 2008

Do you have faith the size of a mustard seed? That's all we need.

Perhaps the miracle has eluded us not because we lack faith, but rather because we live in a generation that can get by most of the time without really loving—I mean really loving—loving sacrificially—loving with vulnerability—loving with the force of a Mack truck. I mean the make-you-join-a-freedom-ride-even-though-you-may-be-lynched kind of love. I mean the kind of love that looks on the humanity of "the other" and is melted from the inside—the kind of love that lays down one's life, one's dreams, one's health, and one's well-being for the good of "the other."

Have we gotten by without that kind of love? Have we exchanged that kind of love for Facebook "Like"? "Like" is about what brings pleasure. Love can hurt. Love calls for sacrifice. Love requires courage.

The one who loves—I mean truly loves—in this world will always ultimately experience great loss. For we are all, ultimately, traveling alone. We come into this world alone and we take our bow and exit alone. But here is the crux of the crux: It is how we live in the middle that determines the miracles we are privileged to see.

Did we love? Did love compel us to walk forward by faith?

I consider one mountain range surrounding us right now: comprehensive immigration reform. Is this your mountain? Is it the mountain your neighbor stares down every day? Or is it the mountain that stands between you and the neighbor you'll never know?

Now consider this: Do you love your neighbor? I mean really love them.

Recently, I have witnessed this kind of love. American citizens have exercised sacrificial love for their undocumented immigrant neighbors: They have fasted and prayed and marched and organized. They have loved.

Now we stand at that moment when mountains need to move. Do you have faith the size of a mustard seed? Good. That's all we need. ■

Lisa Sharon Harper *is senior director of mobilizing at Sojourners.*

The Radical Prophecy of Love

As Alexian Brothers we understand that which breaks the heart of a prophet breaks the heart of God. We are a religious community of men committed to compassion in action. We serve the needs of the poor, elderly, homeless, incarcerated, mentally and physically ill.

The love of Christ compels us to act. From caring for the victims of the Black Plague in Europe to ministering to the needs of communities in today's society, we continue to be dedicated to Christ's healing mission.

DOES THE LOVE OF CHRIST COMPEL YOU?

If you're ready to dedicate yourself to something greater than yourself we invite you to find out what it's like to be an Alexian Brother. Ordinary Men Living Extraordinary Lives!

ALEXIAN BROTHERS

Ordinary Men Leading Extraordinary Lives.

To learn more call 847-463-8904 or visit AlexianBrothers.org

© 2014 Alexian Brothers Health System

BY JIM RICE

'War is Terrorism'

ONE DAY, WHEN I was a student at Christ the King Elementary School in my hometown of Richland, Wash., the nuns gathered all the kids, two by two, and walked us outside to the parking lot. There sat a mobile van emblazoned with the logo of the Atomic Energy Commission and the words "Whole Body Scanner."

One at a time, we were led into the van, where we laid on a white-sheathed table beneath a large, (scary), medical-looking machine. There was a whirring sound, and after a minute or two we were told to get up and make room for the next child. We weren't told what the process was for, but it's safe to assume that the government was interested in the effects of radiation on those of us who were "downwinders" from one of the nation's largest nuclear complexes.

Richland was (and is) the bedroom community for the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. Hanford was built in the 1940s as part of the Manhattan Project, the massive wartime program that led to the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II.

EXTRA The Villager EXTRA

IT'S ATOMIC BOMBS

News Spreads Slowly, Surprises Everyone Here

Jubilation And Satisfaction Follows Revelation Of Product Manufactured Here

President Truman Releases Secret of Hanford Product

Development Of Bomb

The Aug. 6, 1945, edition of the local paper revealed the secret "product" that Hanford workers had helped create.

The targeting of tens of thousands of civilians was a barbaric act.

Hanford's role was the production of plutonium for the world's first nuclear weapon, the "test" bomb detonated in New Mexico a few weeks before Hiroshima, and for the bomb that destroyed Nagasaki three days later.

Those weapons were dropped 69 years ago, but the debate about their morality continues. It emerged again this spring when the two Missouri senators proposed renaming D.C.'s Union Station after Harry S. Truman, who authorized history's only nuclear attack on people. One commenter in a related discussion wrote, "I have a problem with judging past cultures by today's standards. To end WWII we dropped bombs on cities filled with innocent civilians. By today's standards that would be condemned. Are you willing to say we should not have done that to end WWII?"

Even by the standards of the time, the intentional targeting of tens of thousands of civilians was a barbaric act (and unneeded militarily—Gen. Douglas McArthur called it "unnecessary," since "Japan was already prepared to surrender"). Before World War II, the rules of "civilized" warfare prohibited the intentional killing of civilians. Admittedly, this was an oft-violated principle; civilians have always suffered greatly in war. But the general intent was that armies fought against armies, not civilians.

Early in the war, even Hitler refrained from bombing civilians. According to a 1961 history of the Battle of Britain, Hitler commanded the Luftwaffe that "The war against England is to be restricted to destructive attacks against industry and air force targets" and that "every effort should be made to avoid unnecessary loss of life amongst the civilian population." That soon changed, and cities and towns became targets; in one of the largest raids on London, almost 3,000 civilians died.

The Allies, for their part, engaged in massive air attacks on German cities; one of the more horrendous examples was the 1945 firebombing of Dresden, which killed an estimated 25,000 people. That March, hundreds of U.S. bombers carpeted Japan's largest city, Tokyo, with thousands of incendiary weapons and cluster bombs carrying napalm, jelled-gasoline, and white phosphorus. More than 100,000 civilians were killed, a million more injured. That was the context of the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in which two bombs killed more than 200,000 people.

With the distance of time, these horrific actions will likely be viewed as among the most shameful in human history.

Vincent Harding, an eminent chronicler of the Southern freedom movement who passed away this spring, was pictured in his *New York Times* obituary wearing a button that proclaimed "War is Terrorism." Given that one of the definitions of terrorism is the intentional targeting of civilians, and given the realities of modern warfare, it's hard to argue with that statement. ■

***Jim Rice** is editor of* Sojourners.

Does your laptop have a conscience?

(Nope, but you do. So why not share it?)

Get this colorful Micah 6:8 laptop skin FREE with a new subscription to *Sojourners* magazine!

This adhesive laptop skin allows you to spread the message of social justice wherever you go—the office, school, home, or your local coffee shop! This 10-inch-by-7-inch skin fits most tablets, too!

Protect your laptop or tablet from scratches and wear and tear while creatively expressing prophetic justice drawn from Micah 6:8.

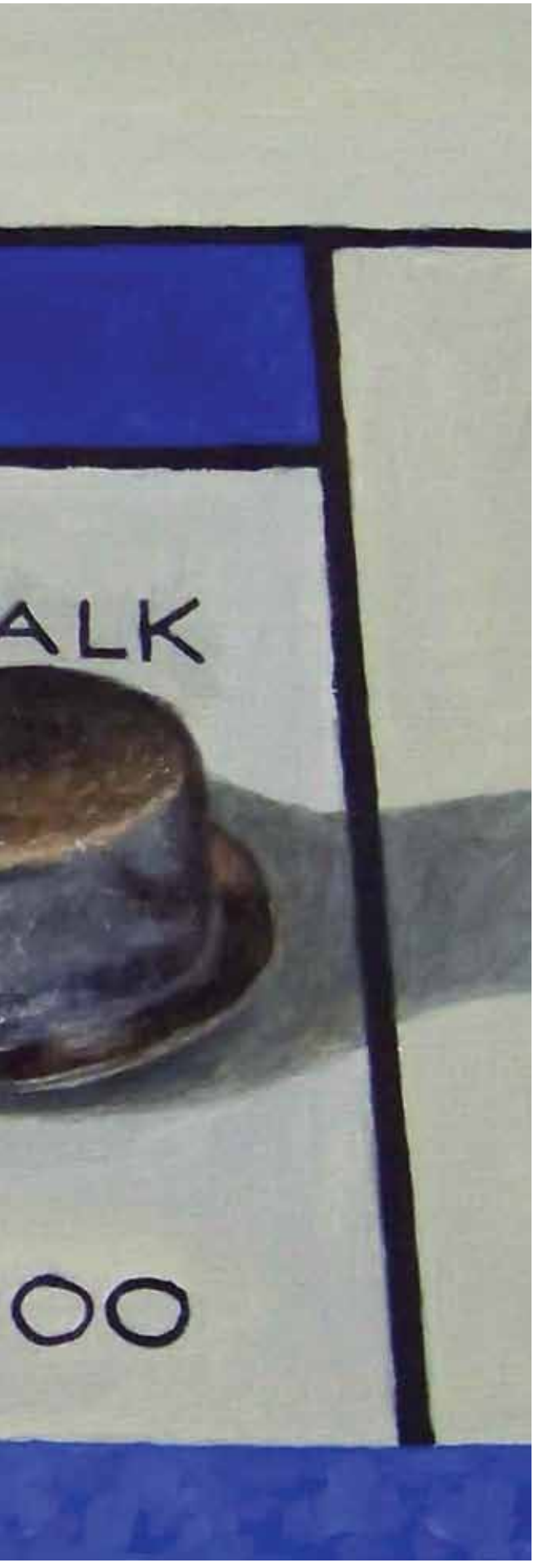
(And the nonpermanent backing leaves no residue.)

Call 1-800-678-9691 to place your paid order; mention code S1408MCH and ask for your free Micah 6:8 laptop skin. Offer available for phone orders only.

Call today to get your laptop or tablet skin.

sojourners
sojo.net/store

COLLECT
O SALARY
PASS
BOARDWA
PRICE $4



Paintings by John A. Clapp

THE RICH GET RICHER

Ninety-five percent of all economic gains in the U.S. since the Great Recession went to the top 1 percent. What does our growing wealth inequality mean for the future of democracy?

by **JULIE POLTER**

ECONOMIC INEQUALITY ISN'T NEW. But this spring it became trendy, especially after Pope Francis dropped the tweet heard 'round the world in April: "Inequality is the root of social evil."

Around the same time, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*—a just-short-of-700-page book by French economist Thomas Piketty—became a best seller. Piketty, while not quite as concise as the pope, also sees wealth inequality as a problem—he focuses on its damaging effects on democratic institutions. Using extensive data, Piketty makes the case that escalating wealth inequality is built into capitalism. Without specific interventions, he writes, our politics and culture will be dominated by a small elite controlling vast amounts of primarily inherited wealth. It might create a new Gilded Age for some, but it won't be any shinier for regular folks than the first one a century ago.

CHANCE

When class and economic status become news, the conversation tends to get a little shrill. Terms such as "Marxist" and "anti-business" were tossed around freely in reference to both Piketty and the pope. Some, of a more spiritual bent, sought to warn the pope and other Christians who decry inequality about the biblical sin of "covetousness," offering reminders of the virtue of hard work. (I guess the hidden message of the parable of the rich man and the beggar at his gate is that Lazarus is envious; the real issue must be Lazarus' poor work ethic and lack of get-up-and-go!)

But the inequality gap should be of concern to everyone, whatever their income or ideology. The point is not the fact that there are differences in wealth—those exist in any human society. And it's not necessarily helpful or productive to seek scapegoats or assign broad characteristics to particular classes; neither poor people in general nor rich people in general are inherently noble, lazy, or scheming—temptations may vary, but good and evil can be found in people of every economic status.

What's most important—and troubling—is the decades-long, systemic expansion of the economic *distance* between the richest of the rich and the poorest of the poor, and the long, backward slide for the majority of those in-between.

The gap's the thing. No matter what your favored economic theory, this distance is a big problem. As Matthew Yglesias writes on vox.com, "Piketty's vision of a class-ridden, neo-Victorian society dominated by the unearned wealth of a hereditary elite cuts sharply against both liberal notions of a just society *and* conservative ideas about what a dynamic market economy is supposed to look like."

Extreme wealth inequality carries the seeds of economic and social destruction: As more people are excluded from opportunity, the bulk of the economy as a whole slows and becomes less sustainable, and the social fabric strains and tears. Extreme inequality unravels participatory democracy and leads to the rule of the few over the many. It fails to uphold ethical standards of fairness and the common good. Instead of markets serving human needs and dignity, money becomes an idol, and people and values are sacrificed to serve what Pope Francis calls a "deified market."

A fading American dream?

There are several ways to assess relative levels of economic equality or inequality. One is by comparing income (earned salary and wages). Another is by measuring wealth (owned assets, such as houses, stocks, and cash).

Thomas Piketty's work focuses on *wealth* inequality, but wealth inequality is closely related to trends regarding income. The headline grabber these days is skyrocketing executive compensation. For example, a recent study looked at 337 chief executives at S&P 500 companies. The *median* pay package for these CEOs rose above eight figures in 2013 ($10 million and up), according to an Associated Press/Equilar study released in May. The head of a typical large public company earned a record $10.5 million, an increase of 8.8 percent since 2012. The median CEO pay package has grown more than 50 percent since the official end of the Great Recession in 2009, in large part due to the booming stock market, since top executives increasingly are paid in stock, not cash.

The 400 richest Americans have as much wealth as all 41 million African Americans.

Some still cling to the outdated and idealized vision that the U.S. offers economic opportunity for all who seek it. From the post-World War II years through the early 1970s, wages, employment levels, and benefits *did* increase for the majority of Americans.

But conditions were different then. During that period, as economist Robert Reich notes, "tax rates on top incomes in the U.S. never fell below 70 percent, a larger portion of our economy was invested in education than before or since, over a third of our private-sector workers were unionized, we came up with Medicare for the elderly and Medicaid for the poor, and built the biggest infrastructure project in history, known as the interstate highway system."

Now, tax rates on the top incomes have been lowered to 39.6 percent. Wages for the majority of Americans were stagnant for three decades after the '70s; since then, they've been in precipitous decline. Today, a smaller portion of our economy is invested in education—35 states provide less per-pupil funding than prior to the recession. The share of the workforce represented by unions has declined to 13.1 percent, according to the Economic Policy Institute. (Unions are important because collective bargaining produces higher wages for those in a union and can raise the wage-and-benefits standard across a whole industry.) While Medicare and Medicaid continue as safety nets for some of the most vulnerable, escalating health-care costs are buffeting the middle and working class. And these days, the big infrastructure projects—from interstate highways and bridges to urban sewage systems and our electrical grid—are badly in need of repairs or upgrades.

Some like to think that a rising stock market lifts all boats, but the numbers tell another story. Since 2009, median household incomes, adjusted for inflation, have been falling, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Nearly all of the income growth in our economy has been in jobs paying more than $75,000 a year—about one in eight jobs. "Almost a third of the 153.6 million Americans with a job at any time in 2012 made less than $15,000, averaging just $6,100," writes David Cay Johnston in *Divided: The Perils of Our Growing Inequality*. These include food service workers, cashiers, home-health aides, and others who are making minimum wage and not given full-time hours or benefits. While low-wage jobs are becoming more plentiful, higher-paid work has become harder to find. A recent report from the National Employment Law Project found that there are 1.85 million more jobs in lower-wage industries than just before the Great Recession, but 2 million *fewer* jobs in mid- and higher-wage industries.

Since the recovery began a few years ago, according to economist Emmanuel Saez, 95 percent of all economic gains went to the top 1 percent of earners. Those making less than $100,000 per year—roughly 80 percent of U.S. households—aren't faring nearly as well. This is what income inequality looks like now.

It's the wealth, stupid.

But the stunning numbers around *income* inequality don't represent the *really* big gap: wealth inequality.

One percent of households in the U.S. own 35.4 percent of all our wealth, as of 2010. Wealth, in this case, means all the stocks, houses, and cash that people own. Ten percent of households in the U.S. own 76.7 percent of all our wealth. (The bottom 40 percent of U.S. households carries "negative wealth," or debt.)

This is where Thomas Piketty and his vast swaths of data come in.

Analyzing data from 20 developed countries over time, ranging as far back as the 18th century, Piketty finds that, despite different policies and growth rates, the ratio of wealth (the value of all financial assets owned by its citizens) to national income (defined as a country's gross domestic product) is increasing.

Piketty also looks at the rate of return of investment on all that citizen-owned wealth, finding that it averages around 5 percent. The rate of economic growth in developed countries for the past several decades has been lower than 5 percent. This means existing wealth is growing faster than GDP—and since wages and salaries usually increase or fall in relation to GDP, existing wealth also grows faster than new income earned by workers.

To those whom much has been given ... much more will accrue.

Wealth, therefore, is even more concentrated at the very top of the economic ladder than income—and, without changes, will become more so.

"The focus on the wealthiest 1 percent is distracting us from the dizzying concentration of wealth among the top one-tenth of 1 percent," writes Chuck Collins, director of the Program on Inequality and the Common Good at the Institute for Policy Studies. "The largest wealth gains are flowing to the top one-in-a-thousand households. For example, the 400 richest Americans possess combined assets of over $2 trillion. They now have as much wealth as all 41 million African Americans." (For more on this devastating statistic and on the role of racial bias in economic inequality, read Ta-Nehisi Coates' essay "The Case for Reparations" in *The Atlantic*.)

With each generation, the wealthiest pass on those assets to heirs. This is how financial dynasties are built. By 2050, the richest people in the U.S. won't be tech entrepreneurs or CEOs receiving celestial-scaled salaries; they will be the scions of today's wealthiest few. "The oligarchs of tomorrow," as Collins puts it, "are likely to have names like Walton, Zuckerberg, Soros, Adelson, Trump, and Koch, even if they never work a day in their lives."

'One person, one vote'? Not so much.

Studies have linked extreme wealth inequality to everything from negative public health effects to increased political polarization to market crashes. But one of the most corrosive and potentially devastating effects of intensely concentrated wealth is the damage it does to democracy.

This spring, researchers from Princeton and Northwestern found that "economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on U.S. government policy, while mass-based interest groups and average citizens have little or no independent influence." The results support the hypothesis that our country operates under a political reality that theorists call "economic elite domination." This tradition argues that "U.S. policy making is dominated by individuals who have substantial economic resources, i.e. high levels of income and/or wealth—including, but not limited to, ownership of business firms." Northwestern political theorist Jeffrey Winters recently described the U.S. as a "civil oligarchy," where the wealthiest citizens dominate policy concerning crucial issues of wealth and income-protection.

Libertarian billionaires Charles and David Koch are examples of the very wealthy who convert that wealth to political power and influence. They exert political pressure at the national level, where they fund the tea party movement and oppose policies to address climate change. They are also the primary funders of Americans for Prosperity, which works nationally and locally, on everything from the Wisconsin's governor race to a successful bid to stop a small tax levy to support the Columbus, Ohio zoo.

"It is possible to live a lifetime and not know one of the 6 million Americans who now depend entirely on food stamps to survive," Johnston writes, "because we are so economically segregated." This is even truer

of the very wealthy who live with little or no exposure to the economic concerns of the vast majority of citizens. Yet they have vast wealth to contribute to political action committees and campaigns, and so can wield disproportionate political power to seek the policies that benefit them.

Of course, the wealthy have always found the ear of power and channeled money into movements they found pleasing—but again, we're talking about an ever-shrinking number of people with *extreme* wealth and inordinate power of the purse influencing the policy machine.

And now, the good news.
Inequality is not the result of a law of physics or some other immutable principle. It is the result of a human-created system, and therefore it can be changed.

Through those we elect and the policies they enact, "We make the decisions about who will prosper and who will not—or we let other people make them for us," writes Johnston. "For now, what we have chosen is extreme inequality, the worst by far of any nation with a modern economy."

There are several ways to address inequality through policy:

■ *Investing in education and infrastructure* can address inequality by promoting economic growth for those in the middle class and below. In May, David Leonhardt wrote in *The New York Times Magazine* that ideally we'd "move the issue to the center of every political debate: how we tax wealth, how we tax the income of the middle class and poor (often stealthily through the payroll tax), how we finance schools and measure their results, how we tolerate income-sapping waste in health care, how we build roads, transit systems, and broadband networks."

■ *Raising the minimum wage.* Thirty-four states are currently considering increases to the state minimum wage. In early June, the Seattle City Council passed an ordinance to gradually increase the city's minimum wage to $15 an hour.

■ *Supporting efforts that raise wealth* for citizens at the low end of the economic pool. For example, low-wage and immigrant worker organizing campaigns are fighting for livable wages, against wage theft (deliberate actions by companies to pay workers less than they are owed), and for better working conditions. In December 2013, the growing fast-food-worker movement coordinated one-day strikes in 100 U.S. cities. In early June, Walmart workers organized one-day strikes in 20 cities, calling for an annual salary of $25,000 for Walmart associates and to halt retaliation against workers who organize.

When class and economic status become news, the conversation tends to get a little shrill.

■ *Strengthening the estate tax.* Since 1916, we've had a tool to prevent these damaging concentrations of wealth: the estate tax (also known as the inheritance tax or the "death tax" to those who watch Fox News). The extreme wealth accumulated by a few during the Gilded Age (1890-1915) was seen as a clear and present danger to democracy. The threat was understood to be so severe that a tax was levied on the wealth left to heirs (after a substantial exemption). The purpose of the tax was to raise revenue from those with the most means by encouraging dispersal of wealth and charitable giving prior to death and to slow or stop the creation of wealth dynasties.

The estate tax also serves to modestly mitigate the "large tax breaks that extremely wealthy households get on their wealth as it grows, which can otherwise go completely untaxed," notes Chye-Ching Huang and Nathaniel Frentz at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, since much of that wealth comes from unearned income, such as the appreciation on assets that are only subject to capital gains taxes when the asset is sold.

For almost 85 years, a strong estate tax helped limit the buildup of concentrated wealth. However, in 2001 Congress passed a $1.35 trillion tax cut, incorporating legislation that was a body blow to the estate tax, which only applies to the top 0.14 percent of U.S. households. Since 2001, the exemption amount has quadrupled to $5.25 million per person. Additionally, writes Collins, "The aggressive use of trusts has made the estate tax even more porous."

For those working to promote economic equality and slow the instability created by wealth accumulation at the top, the top policy focus right now, according to Collins, is to fix several "billionaire loopholes" that facilitate estate tax avoidance. In addition, Bill Gates Sr. promotes using funds from a progressive estate tax to provide college tuition grants for young people who complete civilian or military service—thus directly investing some of that wealth into education and the future potential of people of less means. As Piketty reminds us, taxes are a means toward the common good. "Without taxes, society has no common destiny, and collective action is impossible," he writes.

Reversing the culture of exclusion.
Pope Francis bluntly names "an economy of exclusion and inequality" as a danger to both bodies and souls. "Such an economy kills," he writes, pointing to those who starve from lack of food while others throw food away, and warning that the "culture of prosperity deadens us" and saps compassion and empathy.

Churches are natural places for reversing this kind of culture. Encouraging people of faith to join organizing efforts and fostering political and social relationships across class lines are how we learn about the cares and concerns of others. Then we begin to invest in them and their well-being in a new way.

The stakes for addressing this problem, Francis says, couldn't be higher: "As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems or, for that matter, to any problems."

This moment, when inequality is in the news, may not last—but inequality won't go away anytime soon. For the "least of these," and the rest of us too, we need to keep our eye on the gap, and the ways to close it. ■

***Julie Polter** is a senior associate editor of* Sojourners.

Getty Images

BY DORIS BARTEL

THE PLAY'S THE THING

How community theater helped change a centuries-old tradition of kidnapping girls for marriage.

WHEN I FIRST arrived in a western district of Georgia, on the shores of the Black Sea, in 2004, I met a group of young people walking along the muddy dirt road to school. They were walking slowly, linking arms and talking and laughing together. Like teenagers anywhere, the young people were happy to talk about their own lives: tensions with parents, boredom at school, friends, and anticipation of the future.

The girls that I spoke with also mentioned their fears of being abducted for marriage.

Surprisingly, in this modern era, the abduction of girls for marriage was still considered common and acceptable. In rural Georgia, if a young man fancied a young woman, he arranged with his friends to have her abducted as she walked home from school. If she was held overnight away from her home (and often raped), her chaste reputation was lost, and she had no choice but to leave school, marry him, and move in with his family. Honor demanded it.

In rural Georgian high schools, rumors flew about who was about to be kidnapped, or who was thinking of kidnapping someone. Boys thought it was romantic and a test of bravery and manhood. Almost all the boys we spoke with said they would help a friend abduct a girl if requested, and many said they felt pressured by their friends to abduct girls. It was seen as a way of proving yourself a man, a true Georgian man.

Most girls were afraid of being abducted, but some girls I spoke with had mixed feelings, wondering if they could manage to elope with their boyfriends using a traditional kidnapping story as the cover to overcome their parents' disapproval.

Parents also commented on the problem. One mother of a teenage girl said, "When I was in school, kidnapping girls for marriage was a big problem. In order to be a 'real man' and demonstrate his bravery, a boy had to kidnap a girl. But girls did not think kidnapping was romantic. They saw it for what it was—violence."

In 2004, abduction of teenage girls was still common in rural Georgia. One 2002 study reported that up to 40 percent of rural marriages in Georgia were the result of "bride kidnapping." The

Photos courtesy of CARE

High school students in a Georgian town on the Black Sea perform "Closed Space," a play they wrote to address the tradition of kidnapping girls for marriage.

practice is common in the rest of the Caucasus region and in many parts of the world, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, the Middle East, and North Africa, though statistics are hard to find since most cases are not reported.

Lawyers and human rights activists said it was a violation of human rights and against the law in Georgia. Yet because it was rooted in culture and social custom, it was very difficult to overcome through legal channels. Many people in Georgia said that kidnapping was a cultural tradition for centuries. Kidnapping for the sake of honor was seen as an inevitable continuation of nine centuries of tradition still alive in their folk songs, dances, and poems. It was not seen as a problem; in fact, many explained it as a part of a proud cultural heritage originating in the golden age of Georgia in the 12th century.

Theater as an entry point

Georgians are known for their love of language and literature, as well as music, dance, and theater. (Their neighbors call them the people with the golden tongues.) Two local organizations that are focused on youth development decided, with the help of an international development agency, to tackle the problem of bride kidnapping by working with young people using an arts-focused strategy: interactive theater.

The youth activists chose to use traditional cultural tools because they saw the problem as culturally rooted. Knowing that their fellow Georgians greatly honor playwrights and actors, they wanted to use theater as an entry point for transformation.

They chose an interactive theater methodology called "forum theater" or "theater of the oppressed," which uses narrative storytelling to draw public attention and action to address issues of oppression, discrimination, and violence.

A small team including high school-aged boys and girls put together the first script for the play, which they called "Closed Space." They drafted the script in two weeks after interviewing people in the community about kidnapping. They interviewed people who had previously organized a kidnapping, those who had helped, those who watched but did not intervene, as well as the kidnap victims and their friends and families, exploring motivations, impulses, and reactions of those involved. They wrote a prototypical story stitched together from the various narratives they had collected.

The script used dialogue between characters to expose the root causes of the issue, including the cultural traditions about how men prove their virility, about how abducted women have no choice but face great stigma, and about the role that bystanders play. The script included several key decision-points where the characters make an important choice that affects the outcome.

After the script was developed, the organizers put together a small acting troupe that included two professional actors and adult and teenage volunteers from the local communities. One teenage girl who was part of the community acting troupe said, "When I read the script, I liked it and thought it was very realistic. I know girls from my school who have been kidnapped."

The 20-minute play had seven characters and a narrator. The narrator explained the situation and the scenes, and also engaged the audience after the play ended, asking audience members for comments and suggestions about the root causes of the issue and the choices made by the characters. If someone in the audience objected to a character's choice, the narrator invited volunteers from the audience to re-enact that scene with their own improved version of a character's decisions and actions, by exchanging places with the actor. The play was rewound and re-enacted from many decision-points many times, each time with a different character making alternate choices.

In this way, the play had not one but many endings, chosen by the audience. Community members expressed their opinions (and everyone had an opinion!) about what should have happened. By doing so in front of their peers, on a stage, they also embodied their ideal in a physical way, usually to general applause.

> Boys thought kidnapping girls was romantic and a test of bravery and manhood. Girls saw it for what it was—violence.

Throughout these re-enactments, the narrator facilitated the community debate and asked provocative questions, but allowed communities to discuss among themselves and come to their own judgments about their values. In the public debates, community-held values of fairness and justice prevailed, even though it meant acknowledging the harm done in this centuries-old custom. This was the first time that many had heard a public declaration that girls have the right to avoid abduction or can return to her family if she is abducted.

Proving their masculinity

In one instance, an elderly woman asked to replay a key moment in the script where the kidnapper and his male friends are making plans to kidnap a girl. The woman played the character of the male friend, who this time told the kidnapper character that he did not have to kidnap a girl to prove his masculinity, by way of arguing him out of the decision.

The narrator stopped the actors and asked the audience to debate this point: Do young men feel that they need to kidnap a girl to prove their masculinity? Several people in the audience shouted their answers: No, they didn't.

Using "forum theater"—interactive performances that promote social change—Georgians address age-old attitudes about women and girls.

The narrator paused again, and asked the young men in the audience: Do you feel you need to kidnap a girl to prove your masculinity? One young man said, "Yes, of course." Other young men in the audience contradicted him, saying "No, we don't." The first young man would not let the point go, and felt strongly that his masculine identity was at stake without a kidnapping. In front of their parents, their teachers, their siblings, their peers, and the whole community, the other young men in the audience talked him out of it. In the end, he agreed that one did not need to kidnap to prove one's masculinity.

At the end of the discussion, the narrator summarized the values of the community that emerged in the debates: that kidnapping was not fair to girls, that boys did not need to kidnap girls to prove anything, that bystanders could easily play a role in preventing kidnapping, and that kidnapped girls should not be stigmatized and rather be welcomed back into their homes and communities.

The actors performed the play free of charge for multigenerational audiences in theaters, in the street, and on the beach hundreds of times over the course of a year. The debates about how people should behave happened onstage and off throughout that year. It seemed to change behaviors among teens and adults as well. One parent reported seeing her own son changing his perspectives and behaviors: "Earlier, he was thinking only from the point of view of the boy and not the girl," she said. "Now he thinks of consequences for the girl. I have seen him arguing with others and trying to change their views about kidnapping."

'I realized I can change'

The public debates also gave people who privately had been against kidnapping permission to safely speak out against this custom in ways they had never done before. It also gave people in the community tools to know how to act when situations came up in the future. After a performance, one man reported, "When I was asked to come on the stage and play my version of the dialogue between a father and a son, I realized that I can make a change."

The debate style of the forum theater also allowed communities to grapple with the root of the problem and thus create more durable solutions. In an exit interview after one of the performances, a man said, "I knew there were many cases of discrimination and violence against women. But I never thought about why it happened before this."

At the start of the project, people considered kidnapping to be normal and said it was happening regularly. Three years later, tolerance for kidnapping was reduced, and girls said they had less fear of walking by themselves. Both boys and girls were actively pressuring their male friends to drop their plans for kidnapping and seeking to prevent it altogether.

There are no formal statistics comparing the number of kidnapping cases before and after the theater project, but young people surveyed at the end of the project reported that cases were dropping. One 15-year-old girl said, "Before we started performing the play, there was not a month that passed by that a girl from this area was not kidnapped. Now, kidnappings have virtually stopped—we haven't had one here in six months."

Young people said that they were taking action to prevent kidnappings in their villages. One young man said, "Kidnapping used to happen in this community more than two times per year. Last summer was the last one; they are decreasing. They are decreasing because ... people are better informed due to theater performances followed by discussions."

The youth activists were proud of the changes that they saw among the young people and adults in the villages where they were working. They felt that there was more open communication between parents and children, and more open communication in their communities about topics that had been taboo.

Cultural change can and does happen. A team with tools and techniques to shine light on centuries-old habits can also find ways to help a community articulate values for themselves and find options for more supportive and equitable behaviors. A local cultural strength—in this case, a love of theater—can be used as a tool to create social change.

"Study well your culture," a team member said, "and you will find many tools that will help you to achieve your goals." ■

Doris Bartel *traveled to Georgia with CARE, an organization that works to end poverty and injustice in more than 70 countries, where she is senior director for gender and empowerment.*

TURNING TOWARD HOME

Once an abandoned structure, the Bell Building offers "housing first"—and hope—to Detroit's homeless • *by* ANGIE SCHMITT

WHEN SHE'S TRAVELING around her north-central Detroit neighborhood, Lucretia Gaulden likes to carry her digital camera with her.

The 39-year-old lifelong Detroiter trains her lens at scenes that represent health—such as an outgoing person she admires, for example—as well as images that represent sickness and danger, such as vacant buildings.

That's the assignment she's working on in her photography class at the Bell Building. Until Lucretia came to the Bell Building 17 months ago, she never had a chance to participate in a photography class. When she was homeless, attending a weekly class of any type, even owning a camera, might have been out of reach.

Orphaned at 13, pregnant at 16, she found herself in prison at 25 after being convicted of being an accomplice to a crime committed by an old boyfriend. When she got out, she bounced between halfway houses and friends' couches.

But since she's arrived at the Bell Building, she's been able to focus on what's more healthy for her. In compliance with her lease, Lucretia pays rent every month on her own furnished one-bedroom apartment. She serves as a floor captain, with responsibilities for maintaining order and community among her immediate neighbors. She's also part of the building's Tenants Advisory Council and is a member of the speakers bureau, a group of residents who do public presentations and speak with the press. Their work is meant to help put a human face on the issue of homelessness.

Homelessness is an enormous problem these days in Detroit. As many as 25,000 of the region's residents are chronically homeless. But when someone like Lucretia arrives at the Bell Building, just like that, the ranks are reduced by one.

Each of the 155 Bell Building residents has a safe, secure apartment that he or she can call home for as long as it's needed. They each have an address that comes with a key to a mailbox. And they have a lot of help: assistance with transportation, literacy support, and job readiness, counseling, and even cooking and art classes.

Their newly renovated building contains a library, a fitness room, a clinic, a chapel, and a lounge where residents can play pool. Neighborhood Service Organization (NSO)—the social service agency that developed the building—even hosted housewarming parties for the residents, pairing them with donors who helped purchase items such as towels, silverware, and DVD players.

A year and a half after arriving, Lucretia said it still thrills her to have a keycard to her own apartment and a key to a mailbox.

"I have something I can call my own," she said. "Now I can just lay my head down and not worry for a while. I don't have to worry about where my next meal is going to come from and if someone's going to steal my things."

THE NSO BELL Building represents a bold new way of thinking about the problem of homelessness in Detroit. Traditionally, treatment of homelessness has focused on overcoming underlying issues such as addiction and mental illness. Housing is often considered a reward for

Photos courtesy of Neighborhood Service Organization

achieving sobriety or obtaining work.

But an approach known as Housing First turns that idea upside down. The Housing First philosophy views housing as a human right rather than a reward. Secure housing, it asserts, is a necessary prerequisite to addressing the underlying problems that prevent an individual from acquiring stable housing in the first place.

The Housing First model was pioneered by Pathways to Housing in New York City in the early 1990s, although some people say some of the fundamental concepts were being used in Toronto centers as far back as the 1970s. The concept is now becoming widely accepted. Centers treating homelessness in places as diverse as Columbus, Ohio, and Long Beach, Calif., are using the Housing First model.

For Sheilah Clay, president and CEO of Neighborhood Service Organization, this concept was something of an epiphany.

With a $27 million annual budget, NSO is one of the largest social service providers in Detroit—and it has decades of experience dealing with the problem of homelessness. Since the 1970s, NSO has operated the Tumaini Center, a support center for the homeless. Tumaini serves about 3,000 individuals a year, providing emergency food and clothing, treatment for substance abuse, and case management.

But around 2006, Clay experienced what she calls a "defining moment" and realized that she was "managing [homelessness], not ending it."

Clay then traveled around the country exploring Housing First programs. She became convinced that it was the way forward.

"Housing First was an expansion of the direction we were already headed in," she said. "We were the safety net. We provided mental health services. We could refer you to other places that were doing housing."

But there was never enough housing for the people who needed it.

> "When you house someone, that's when you end their homelessness."
>
> **—Sheilah Clay**

A work of progress: From top left, the historic Bell Building, with its distinctive Yellow Pages sign; the plans for remodeling; the construction cranes at work; and NSO president Sheilah Clay and then-mayor Dave Bing celebrate the work of providing permanent homes to Detroit's homeless.

"I have something I can call my own."

—Lucretia Gaulden
(above, in her new apartment's kitchen)

From architectural rendering to realization, the NSO transformed an unused building into a vibrant home and community for dozens of Detroit's disadvantaged residents. Top center and right: Vangelina Spinks in her new home, and other NSO Bell residents at a recent celebration.

"When you house someone, that's when you end their homelessness," Clay stated.

NSO undertook an extensive survey of the city's homeless population. The survey team interviewed 211 homeless people about how they ended up on the streets and the trials they faced there. About half of this population, the survey revealed, struggled with substance abuse or mental illness. Some 15 percent had grown up in foster care. Another 13 percent were veterans.

And the survey revealed something else important: Homelessness is expensive. That's one of the key tenets of Housing First: Housing homeless individuals tends to exert less cost on society than the expensive interventions that might otherwise be required. For instance, the 211 people that NSO interviewed reported 456 emergency room visits, and 149 trips to jail, over a period of three months. Those expenses can add up to more than $50,000 a year in public costs for each homeless person.

Clay understood what needed to be done. And leaders of a nonprofit partner called Focus: HOPE on Oakman Boulevard recommended a place they thought would be perfect for launching a Housing First project—the dilapidated 10-story former home of the Michigan Bell Telephone Co., long known for its iconic "Find it Fast: Yellow Pages" sign.

Deborah Fisher, a director at Focus: HOPE, saw the potential in the Bell Building. Focus' HOPE Village—a supportive community modeled after the Harlem Children's Zone—is located right down the street. The Bell Building being the way it was—namely large and vacant—was a drain on the neighborhood.

By teaming up, the nonprofits agreed they could be a stabilizing force in the low-income

neighborhood. NSO was able to reach an agreement with Focus: HOPE to acquire the building. "This building wasn't on its own; it was part of a bigger picture," Fisher said.

But when NSO obtained it, it looked like too many buildings in Detroit. The windows were broken out. Many people thought it was beyond repair.

Clay had a difficult time convincing her board of directors that it was a worthwhile financial risk for the organization. Beginning in 2007, she was also up against bad timing: a housing market collapse and an extreme retraction in the credit markets. "Someone said this is a really bad time to do this," she recalled. "I said, 'Tell that to the 155 people I'm trying to house.'"

Part of the initial challenge, said Clay, was finding a champion in an important public position. But a breakthrough came in 2007, when Clay was able to convince the deputy mayor to take a two-day trip to New York City to see a Housing First project in action. "He came back here like Moses with the tablets," Clay said. So just like that they had their City Hall champion.

Then there was the funding problem. For two years, architects, government officials, accountants, and NSO staff met monthly to plan the project and develop a financing scheme. *The Novogradac Journal of Tax Credits* wrote in 2012 that "some less committed developers would have given up."

What they arrived at was a kitchen-sink approach. The project received $1.9 million from federal tax credits and another $5.5 million from state brownfield redevelopment funds. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development contributed a $400,000 grant. The City of Detroit chipped in $5 million in federal community development grants. Another $22 million came from low-income housing tax credits. The Kresge Foundation and the McGregor Fund also contributed, as did the Local Initiatives Support Corporation. Bank of America provided an $18 million loan. Thousands of individual donors came through as well—significantly increasing NSO's total donor base.

The Housing First philosophy views housing as a human right rather than a reward.

Eventually, the organization was able to cobble together the $40 million it needed to begin the $52 million renovation.

When NSO broke ground in 2011, hundreds attended. Mayor Dave Bing cut the ribbon.

Perhaps what supporters find so gratifying about this project is the way it blends the repairing of physical infrastructure with restoring individual lives. The neighborhood—Oakman Boulevard, or north-central Detroit, near the border of Highland Park—is already starting to see the benefit, said Fisher.

Next door to the Bell Building is a half-collapsed former confectionery. NSO was planning to redevelop the site for a sports center and perhaps additional housing. But the property was recently purchased by a private developer who is interested in partnering with NSO to bring the property back to productive use.

"It's becoming sort of a whole confluence of activity there," said Fisher.

SINCE SEPTEMBER 2012, when the first residents moved in, the Bell Building has already witnessed 39 people move on to apartments and houses of their own.

Lucretia Gaulden hopes to someday get there herself. Since she arrived at the NSO Bell Building, one of the most important lessons she's learned, Lucretia said, is to ask for help.

The staff—200 of whom have offices in the building—help her with résumés and job searches. She's received help signing up for federal disability payments and is working on getting health insurance.

"I have that support now that I needed," she said. "I'm one of them type of people that didn't want to ask for help. I like to try to do it on my own."

To someday do her part to help others, she said—that's her highest ambition.

"Doing it on your own will get you nowhere," she noted. "We all need help." ■

***Angie Schmitt** is a Cleveland-based writer and activist who specializes in urban affairs.*

BY QUEEN QUET
As told to Onleilove Alston

'WE ARE NOT AN ISLAND'

The Gullah/Geechee Nation, extending from North Carolina to Florida, battles against corporate encroachment, environmental racism, and climate change.

MARQUETTA L. GOODWINE, a computer scientist, mathematician, and community organizer, grew up on the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina. On July 2, 2000, Goodwine was "enstooled," in a traditional African ceremony, as "Queen Quet," political and spiritual leader of the Gullah/Geechee Nation that extends from coastal North Carolina to Jacksonville, Fla.

"A lot of people don't know that we exist," she told *Sojourners*. "People are unaware that there is a subgroup of the African-American community that's an ethnic group unto itself, with nationhood status for itself."

Queen Quet, and the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition she founded, are actively engaged in battling environmental racism and climate change. As a cultural leader of an Indigenous community, she works to preserve her people's heritage in the land and stop corporate encroachment. As a spiritual leader of a people who practice a unique form of faith that adheres to Christian doctrine while being distinctly African, she nurtures her people's tradition of communal prayer, song, and dance, as well as their connection to Praise Houses, the small places of worship built on plantations during slavery.

Sojourners contributing writer Onleilove Alston, a faith-based organizing associate at the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies in New York City, sat down with Queen Quet on St. Helena Island in Beaufort County, South Carolina, to learn more about the Gullah/Geechee people, their spirit, and their struggle for justice.

—The Editors

Photos courtesy of Gullah/Geechee Nation

Without our spirituality
I don't think our ancestors
would have survived.
—Queen Quet

THE GULLAH/GEECHEE PEOPLE are the descendants of African people that were enslaved on the Sea Islands. We are descendants of Igbo, Yoruba, Mende, Mandinka, Malinke, Gola, Ife, and other ethnic groups from the Windward Coast of Africa, as well as Angola and Madagascar.

We also have Indigenous American ancestry from the Cusabo, Yamasee, Cree, and Edistow, the original inhabitants of the land now held in the Gullah/Geechee Nation. A socio-anthropologist segregated us at one point, saying that Gullahs are on the South Carolina Sea Islands and Geechees are on the Georgia Sea Islands, but there is no difference between us. We are one people.

In 1999, I became the first Gullah/Geechee in history to speak before the United Nations. Now I am a member of the International Human Rights Association of American Minorities, an NGO with U.N. consultative status, and the International Human Rights Council (a coalition of human rights scholars and activists that works on key human rights issues).

I also work with other Indigenous peoples around the world to help all of us survive. Especially, I'm working with the Small Island States. We're not just faced with cultural genocide caused by corporations attempting to displace us so they can come on our land, we're also faced with climate change, because we live directly in the Atlantic Ocean. I always tell the children, "We're from islands, but we are not an island." Every individual will need somebody else at some point.

THERE HAVEN'T BEEN any other Gullah/Geechee kings or queens enstooled in North America. I am the first one. Of course, in our ancestral background and collective consciousness, this practice has existed. One of the reasons our elders returned to an enstoolment ceremony is because it was part of our tradition in the motherland to have chiefs, queen mothers, and so on as respected members of the community.

The elders in the community, who had watched me and told my mother that I was here for a special reason, approached me. "There's too much going on and they are trying to completely put us off the whole coast. If we come together in a united way, will you be the leader? We don't have a title yet—but if the whole community comes together, will you lead?"

I said, "Well, I don't need a special title. But whatever you need me to do, I'll do it."

In 1999 and 2000, a vote took place by petition and online. They got advice from the International Human Rights Association of American Minorities. They took this petition everywhere—under the oak tree, to dinners and festivals. On July 2, 2000, an enstoolment ceremony took place on Sullivan's Island in Charleston—the place where more than 40 percent of Africans enslaved in America came through.

It was our tradition in the motherland to have chiefs and queen mothers as respected members of the community.

We wanted a ceremony there because it is U.S. federal property. We wanted the federal government to acknowledge that this vote had taken place. We had U.N. observers there to certify that the vote was official. When they called for an agreement on that vote, everyone said yes. There was not one person who contested. I can only say it was divine order.

I was not only elected, but enstooled as a spiritual leader, as a queen mother. That is why I am Queen Quet, chieftess and head of state of the Gullah/Geechee Nation. I'm now in my second seven-year term. Every three years the Council of Elders, which is like the U.S. president's cabinet, and the Assembly of Representatives, like the U.S. Congress, can review what I've done and they can impeach me. We have a constitution and our own flag, and we are a nationally and internationally recognized nation.

THREE CRITICAL FACTORS will help our people: knowing their rights and protecting our land; having their own institutionalized way to pass on the knowledge; and strengthening our fight against climate change by educating more of our people about how to live in balance with the land by keeping up our fishing and hunting traditions.

Our greatest battle is making sure we maintain land ownership. I founded the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition in 1996 to fight for human and land rights. It is easier to get funding for the natural environment or animals than it is for human rights. This becomes a justice issue in itself. It's a balancing act between social justice issues and funding. You have a constant tug-of-war between communities faced with a lot of injustice and the reality that people want to support charity, but don't see charity as equality.

Many Gullah/Geechee families have deeds that date back to 1862 during the Civil War. Coming out of a time where we were listed next to pieces of property, we then became property owners. I've had to fight a great deal against the cultural genocide caused by the displacement of our people as a result of corporate development. We have an onslaught of people wanting to make the area resorts and gated communities.

There is real ignorance among other people of African-American descent who are descendants of the Gullah/Geechee Nation. They have no knowledge about who they are. They don't see the land as an asset; they see it as a liability because they have to pay taxes on it. They force the family to sell the land, saying "Somebody wants to buy it from us, just sell it, then, at least, I can get this money now." But once you spend that money, it's over with. You've put your whole family and all of its history for sale on an auction block. You have been a participant in cultural genocide.

One of the major things that we have

Gullah Good News

De Sperit ob de Lawd pon me.
E done pick me fa tell de
Good Nyews ta de po people.
E done sen me fa tell dem
wa ain free,
say, "Oona gwine be free."
E sen me fa tell de bline people,
say, "Oona gwine see gin."
E sen me fa free dem wa da suffa.

—Luke 4:18,
from the New Testament in Gullah

Queen Quet, with bowl, at a celebration on the beach. Below, Queen Quet shares a story with school children.

to accomplish is the establishment of the Gullah/Geechee Land and Legacy Fund. The fund would be an endowment so that we can purchase land when, for example, an elder doesn't have heirs to the property—to prevent the county from auctioning it for pennies to someone who is not Gullah/Geechee. Keeping the land is critical to our existence.

I'VE ALSO SPENT the last 20 years collecting anything and everything that reflected Gullah/Geechee culture, whether it was photographs, thesis papers, books. All these things we have now in a massive archive. We're digitizing all of it so that the children can understand who we are as Gullah. A lot of our people didn't realize they were different until they went off to college. All this forms the Gullah/Geechee Alkebulan Archive. We have to leave a legacy of home-grown education and grassroots scholarship.

The Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition worked arm-in-arm with Rep. James E. Clyburn to get the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Act passed and create the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. It's the first law the U.S. Congress ever passed to create a national heritage area dedicated to people of African descent. The bill acknowledges that ours is a unique culture and a consistent part of the fabric of America. I like to say it's the foundation of America. Had Africans not been enslaved to build this country, you would not have the America you have today.

Additionally, St. Helena Island played an important role in the civil rights movement. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Ralph Abernathy, Rev. Jesse Jackson, and Stokely Carmichael (who became Kwame Ture) used to meet here at our Penn Center's Frissell Community House during the 1950s and '60s. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference as well as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee used to meet here, in particular in the Frissell Community House. These grounds were used for trainings. St. Helena Island has never been ridden on by the KKK and, to this day, St. Helena's is still more than 90 percent Gullah/Geechee-owned. Dr. King could be safe here when he came. He came often, writing many of his major speeches here on the island. He even started planning the Poor People's Campaign here.

Finally, we need to put more pressure on Western society to change its ways and behaviors on the land, so we can decrease the carbon emissions and stave off some of the climate change issues. Some of the Penn Center's buildings have been destroyed because we are in a hurricane zone. That's one of the critical social issues we contend with: the services that do—or do not—come when you are a largely black community and a storm is coming.

PEOPLE ALWAYS HEAR me say, "Hunnuh mus tek cyare de root fa heal de tree," a Gullah proverb meaning "You must take care of the root to heal the tree." If you want the fruit to be healed to have another generation of rich fruit, then make sure to get to the root of the problem first. Heal it—and everything else will be fine. God will take care of the tree from there.

Spirituality is critical to all Gullah/Geechee people. It is a thread that ties us together. It's foundational to our existence. The "seeking" tradition is an element that came from our African ancestry that we keep here in the Sea Islands. It's like what some would call a "vision quest" or a process of spiritual discernment. It's an initiation process that was brought into the Praise Houses and then into certain churches.

Seeking means going out into the wilderness. It's like Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness, though seeking only lasts three days. The seeker goes out when it's still dark. You might have to deal with snakes and other things that might be out there, but you know that your faith in God protects you. To be in the Praise House and to be a part of a traditional faith community is important to us. Seeking is a very, very sacred thing—and a very private thing for those who've done it. Without our spirituality I don't think our ancestors would have survived.

My cousin, Matilda Middleton, recently passed away at age 105. I spent a lot of time with her. She remembered stuff back to her childhood and could tell me how things were then. She kept our traditions and culture. Everyone called her Ma, not just because her name was Matilda, but because she was the mother figure of the whole island. "Keep your hand in God's unchanging hand," she would say.

Many of my ancestors and elders lived to be over 100. They fought so hard for the land because they went through so much—right out of enslavement and into the Jim Crow era. Yet they were able to teach us how to love each other and always do things "in decency and in order." ■

'Get Them When They're Young!'

The Child Evangelism Fellowship targets children as young as 4—threatening them with hellfire and damnation—and runs "Good News Clubs" in public schools. Some parents have a problem with that.

by **ASRA Q. NOMANI**

LAST FALL, I WALKED INTO Room 154 at my son's public elementary school in Great Falls, Va., for the inaugural meeting of a new after-school club. The club's lead organizer, a parent at the school, eyed me as she stacked Annie's Cheddar Bunnies snacks and asked about my son, a fifth-grader at the school: "Is Shibli here?"

"No," I responded, quietly taking my seat. I'd come out of curiosity. Our school administrators had emailed parents a flyer advertising a free, exciting, fun-filled hour of "dynamic Bible lessons," "creative learning activities," and "inspiring missionary stories," with a pledge to teach our children "respect for authority," "moral values," and "character qualities." Would

Above, a logo for The Good News Clubs.

this club be a good experience for my fifth grader?

At 3:17 p.m., three minutes before the dismissal bell, the mother-volunteer said: "Asra, I'm going to have to ask you to leave. This is a kid's club, and you don't have a kid [here]." My curiosity turned to suspicion. Instead of leaving, I called the school district's public affairs office who confirmed that the club, held on public school grounds, was in fact open to anyone, with or without a child.

The mother ran out of the room and returned with the school principal. He beelined to me, yelling: "Right now, you are disturbing the children." I looked around. The children were happily munching on their Cheddar Bunnies. He moved the club to the gym. When I followed, he blocked my way.

This was my introduction to the Good News Club, a private Christian organization founded in the 1920s for children age 6 to 12, run by the Child Evangelism Fellowship.

Since the 2001 Supreme Court decision Good News Club vs. Milford (NY) Central School, the number of Good News Clubs in the U.S. has increased from 1,155 clubs with about 17,000 children enrolled to 4,225 clubs in 2014, reaching about 174,000 children—most of them meeting in public schools. Unfortunately, these "good news" clubs are bad news for kids because they employ a shame-based pedagogy that, some report, may become emotionally abusive.

In Great Falls, I found kindred spirits in an interfaith group of parents who were equally distressed by the Good News Club. Mostly mothers, our core group included one who grew up Lutheran and Greek Orthodox, one raised Southern Baptist and married to a Jewish man, and another who was Jewish married to a Christian man. We learned that one of our group, a Jewish mother of two children, has a heartbreaking two-page list of family members who were killed during the Holocaust. We bonded over daily challenges such as health issues, aging parents, and our children's test-taking. Jokingly, we called ourselves the real good news club of Great Falls.

In the days after the start of the club at our school, a second-grade attendee told classmates they were destined for "the underworld" because they didn't attend the Good News Club. She led her classmates in an arts and crafts activity making wooden crosses "to protect them." Later, at the bus stop, an adult supporter of the Good News Club told one of our interfaith group mothers, a Lutheran, "You're going to hell." While the Good News Club flyer advertises that the club is open to children "regardless of religious background," a lesson plan instructs teachers to tell the "unsaved" child "you are not God's child."

In the second week of the club's meeting at our school, the club met behind a locked door, in violation of school policy. When a parent tried to enter, the parent-volunteer and then the school principal demanded the parent sign a form agreeing not to be a disturbance. The school district could provide no other example of a meeting at a school where a parent was required to sign such a document.

Our group of mothers protested. Once we were granted access, our interfaith group sent parent-observers to the club meetings and began learning more about Good News Clubs and the Child Evangelism Fellowship.

THE 2001 SUPREME Court case overturned a lower court ruling that had sided with the Milford, N.Y. school in prohibiting the club from meeting on public school grounds. The school denied the club's request because, it said, the Good News Club's proposed use constituted religious worship, which was prohibited in public schools by the community use policy. The Good News Club sued for violation of freedom of speech—and, ultimately, won. The Supreme Court decided, "What matters for Free Speech Clause purposes is that there is no logical difference in kind between the invocation of Christianity by the club and the invocation

A supporter of the club told one of our mothers, a Lutheran, "You're going to hell."

of teamwork, loyalty, or patriotism by other associations to provide a foundation for their lessons." But the 6-to-3 decision was highly contentious.

Greg Anderson, a firefighter in Shoreline, Wash., told me about how he is raising the alarm with his school board because of Good News Club literature that says teachers who teach evolution are "fools." He fought the Good News Club in the 1990s, when it came to his daughter's elementary school, by insisting students had to be dismissed to go home first before they could come back for the Good News Club. "It's not your grandma's Bible studies," said Anderson. "They like to sneak in, under the radar."

"Good News Club engages in shame-based emotional abuse," said Eric Cernyar, an attorney in Cripple Creek, Colo., who used to argue on behalf of the Good News Club in court cases, before he had a change of heart. As a child growing up in Texas, he attended Good News Club meetings. Five years ago, he and his wife adopted a son, and Cernyar went through soul-searching. "No adult stood up for me," he said, to protect him from his childhood indoctrination. "I wanted to stand up for children."

Katherine Stewart, a journalist who spent two years investigating the group for a book, *The Good News Club: The Christian Right's Assault on America's Children*, said the group "feeds faith-based bullying." She began her investigation after a Good News Club came to her daughter's Santa Barbara, Calif., elementary school.

A second-grade attendee told classmates they were destined for "the underworld" because they didn't attend the Good News Club.

"The Good News Club itself, for example, presents itself to parents and administrators as an outside group. But it creates the false but unavoidable (and, as far as I can tell, intentional) impression in young school children that its form of religion is officially endorsed by the school," said Stewart in an interview in Patheos. "It describes itself with nonthreatening labels such as 'nondenominational' and 'interdenominational,' which makes people think it's broadly Christian, when in fact it's highly sectarian."

At that first club meeting at Great Falls Elementary, with the principal blocking me, it wasn't a district superintendent who paved the way for me to enter; instead it was Wayne Rautio, the white-haired executive director of the Child Evangelism Fellowship in Northern Virginia, who finally gave me permission. Only then did the principal step aside. The school district said the principal acted "appropriately." But, indeed, the club uses the threat of litigation against schools to intimidate principals, school boards, school districts, and PTAs.

As we learned more about Good News Clubs, we were also witnessing club meetings at Great Falls Elementary. One week the children were read the story of a missionary couple, Martin and Gracia Burnham, kidnapped in the Philippines by "terrorists," the Abu Sayyaf Islamic separatist group. The children were led in walking in place "as if they are hungry and tired and have sore feet," as if they were kidnap victims. Another week, volunteers read the story of Lottie Moon, a Baptist missionary to China, and chronicled attacks against her by the Chinese people. The story prompted one child to ask, "Why do the Chinese hate us?"

Moises Esteves, vice president of USA Ministries at Child Evangelism Fellowship's headquarters in Warrenton, Mo., declined comment on

11th Street Baptist Church photo

In 2001, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Good News Clubs—a ministry of Child Evangelism Fellowship—could meet in public schools, such as in Upland, Calif., left, and Bloomington, Ind., right.

Evangelical Community Church photo

the activities at my son's school, saying that state and regional chapters have "a great deal of independence and discretion about how they go about their work." Instructors "attempt to teach the Bible literally," he said. Many in the Fellowship do not believe that Catholics and other Protestants are Christian; Esteves said that's not the Fellowship's official policy.

THE CHILD EVANGELISM Fellowship had a fundraiser this spring to double its number of northern Virginia schools with clubs, from about 24 to 48. One of the key presenters was Mat Staver, an attorney at Liberty Counsel, which sues school districts on behalf of the Child Evangelism Fellowship. Liberty Counsel is a religious nonprofit connected with Liberty University in Lynchburg, Va., founded by televangelist Jerry Falwell.

The Good News Club is considered a leader of the "child evangelism movement," targeting children in a "4/14 window," with the ages of 4 to 14 considered the best to target. The fellowship claims operations in 188 countries.

"This is colonial evangelism," said Randy Woodley, a Keetoowah Cherokee and professor at George Fox Evangelical Seminary, who converted to Christianity as a child. "If the church is the one who holds the power over heaven and hell, that is an awfully powerful position to be in. That's the basis on which America began genocide," he said. "That type of evangelism comes from an imperial strain of control. It's sad. So many good people think they are doing good."

In his work, Woodley said, he teaches young adults who have to go through a form of "deprogramming" from the shame- and fear-based teachings they learned at the hands of well-meaning Christians. "I see them cry and deprogram," he said. "I'd call it manipulative, but I think that the people doing this think they are doing good things for the children."

Brian McLaren, an evangelical preacher and the author of *A New Kind of Christian*, says the Good News Club is particularly "dangerous" because of its "innocent" pretense. "They are known as little old ladies who go create churches," McLaren said. "In their minds, they are doing nothing but standing up for morality. They never thought of how these Bible stories have been used to oppress people. When somebody criticizes them, their first thought is that they are suffering for God. The fact that they have innocent motives actually makes them more dangerous. The fact that they are being criticized is almost beyond their comprehension."

"The irony," McLaren added, "is that tens of thousands of churches teach the Bible this way and never give it a second thought."

Last September, at a Good News Club "teacher training" at Capital Bible Church in Annandale, Va., Rautio of the Child Evangelism Fellowship gave his presentation on "Spiritual Warfare for the Good News Club" to about 40 adult volunteers. "CEF is under attack," he said. "There is spiritual warfare. The enemy is here. It is really Satan opposing God. It is evil vs. God. He uses people," to oppose the Good News Club. He said, "The persecution is a direct response to our good work." Fairfax County, where Great Falls is located, is "Satan's territory," he noted.

A man in the front nodded his head in agreement. Later, as Rautio talked about targeting children, the man yelled: "Get them when they're young!"

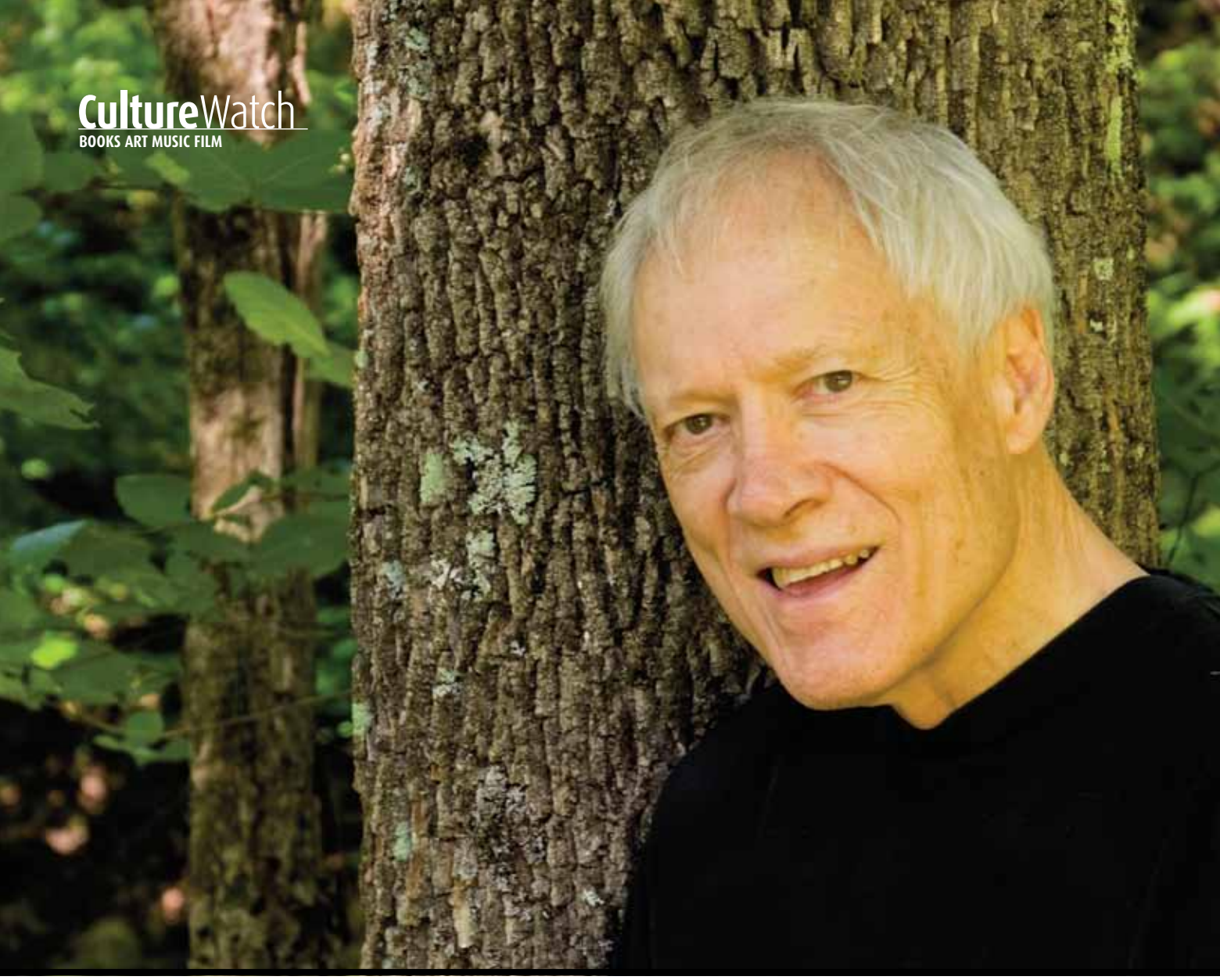
OUR SMALL INTERFAITH group met with the principal and other school officials to express our concerns about the negative effect the Good News Club was having in our community. We gained access to the club meetings—restoring accountability and public presence—but the administrators didn't do much. We educated ourselves about the club's curriculum. Importantly, following Martin Luther King's steps for nonviolent action, we educated other parents and community members. The number of children attending didn't grow much. There were 12 children at the last meeting.

These are the kinds of political issues that are part of American democracy. As an immigrant, as a Muslim, as a woman, I know from my own experience how important it is to push back against extremism. I know how important faith is; how important conversations about religion are. I also know that bad religion that bullies children must be countered with good religion and good conscience. I want my son to grow up with a "respect for authority," "moral values," and "character qualities," as advertised by the Good News Club. But I also want him to be curious, not afraid of other faith traditions. I want him to think critically about faith and learn compassion. I want him to learn from the real good news club of Great Falls that he's "spiritually alive."

Back in Room 154 at Shibli's school, a dozen young children gather in a semicircle around Diane Rautio, Wayne Rautio's wife, as she tells them: "If you believe in Jesus, you will go to heaven. If you don't, you'll be separated from him forever and ever."

One of the students turned around to steal a glance at me. I smiled warmly. Beneath my jacket, I wore my T-shirt: "Coexist." ■

Asra Q. Nomani *(asra@asranomani.com), a former* Wall Street Journal *reporter, is the author of* Standing Alone: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam.



Patricia Bergland

By Bill Wylie-Kellermann

STRUGGLING TO BECOME **HUMAN**

In scholarship and life, Walter Wink sought the truth with passion.

WALTER WINK IS known as a lectionary commentator with lucid biblical insight, a chronicler of nonviolent practice, a scholarly essayist, an arrestee in direct action, and one of the most important theologians of the millennium's turn. He effectively named "the domination system" and its collusive principalities, opened up biblical interpretation to an integrated worldview, and brought the New Testament language of power back on the map of Christian social ethics.

Two years ago he crossed over to God, joining the ancestors and saints. His first two posthumous books have now appeared. They make for good companion volumes. Let me weave back and forth between the two. *Walter Wink: Collected Readings* is the anthology of his core work. *Just Jesus: My Struggle to Become Human* is a short autobiography. The second is the more remarkable—because it's so rare that a world-class scripture scholar should tell his or her own story in relation to encounters with the biblical witness. And all the more so because it was a project undertaken after he was diagnosed with Lewy body dementia.

Given the dementia, the book itself is an effort of his "struggle to become human." An early version of the manuscript included oral history and other sources

***Just Jesus: My Struggle to Become Human*, by Walter Wink. Image.**

***Walter Wink: Collected Readings*, edited by Henry French. Fortress Press.**

Inside CultureWatch

40 Life, Liberty, and Net Neutrality
Why the FCC needs to hear from you this summer

42 Sins of Omission
Jennifer Moon reviews *Tea Party Catholic*

43 A Handbok for Justice
Andrew Wilkes on *Faith-Rooted Organizing*

narratively adapted to a first-person voice, but in the end his partner in all things, June Keener Wink, pressed for it to be pure Walter. No words not his own. His voice is easily recognized in these pages, though not always in the familiar crafted and noted style, rich in quotable one-liners. The jewels are here all right, but this text feels simpler, sparer, plainer. There are prayers and memories of one suffering the weight and creep of memory loss. Though it is a book he conceived and set to writing, June (aided by a sainted editor) lovingly completed the sculpture with autobiographical pieces, journal entries, prayers, dreams, and important portions of his final magisterial work, *The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of the Man*. The latter, also well represented in *Collected Readings*, frames the struggle (Jesus', Walter's, and our own) to become human.

The Human Being is a detailed reading of the so-called "son of man" sayings of the gospels, and is partly in conversation with the Jesus Seminar, in which Wink participated. *Collected Readings* is warmly prefaced by Marcus Borg, among the more notorious of that circle. In *Just Jesus*, Wink recalls first conceiving the memoir in conversation with another participant when they wondered aloud on a walk what it would be like to know the biographies of all the seminar members to understand how their various positions might be rooted in their lives, or even I suppose vice versa. The anthology editor, Henry French, devotes his introduction to stressing the connections between "biography and bibliography."

In the '70s, Wink was denied tenure and academically shunned after publishing a book with the opening line: "Historical biblical criticism is bankrupt."

This is important. Walter Wink was an engaged interpreter, an activist scholar. He somehow thought hermeneutics should be consistent with the intent of the gospels, which were themselves passionate engagements with the Jesus movement and even with the imperial powers that be. Faith calling to faith. In the '70s, he was denied tenure at Union Seminary in New York and academically shunned after publishing a book, *The Bible in Human Transformation*, with the opening line: "Historical biblical criticism is bankrupt." That story is briefly recounted in *Just Jesus*, and most of the little tract is included in the anthology. There he assailed the myth of objectivity and argued for such an engaged reading of the text. In a certain sense, *Just Jesus* is its fruition, the last book fulfilling the first. In the wake of liberation theologies, it's now common for authors up front to identify themselves and their social location. Here Wink takes that to its fullest implication: an entire

Continued on Page 41

New & Noteworthy

THROUGH THEIR EYES

In 2011, Raul Guerrero provided 100 Kodak disposable cameras and taught basic photography skills to nine young students in the Newlands area of Moshi, Tanzania. *The Disposable Project* book brings together their images of their community, with text by Guerrero. the-disposable-project.com

JOURNEYING

"Migration has been, for centuries, not only a source of controversy but a source of blessing," Deirdre Cornell writes in *Jesus Was a Migrant*. Inspired by ministering among immigrants in different settings, this is a beautifully written set of deeply humanizing reflections on the immigrant experience and Christian spirituality. Orbis Books

FAITH AND STRUGGLE

The New Black is a documentary film on how the African-American community is grappling with gay rights. Focusing on the campaign for marriage equality in Maryland, it shows activists, families, and clergy on both sides of the campaign, with special attention to the role played by the black church. newblackfilm.com

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Some Christians happily become "non-goers" to official churches. In *How to Be a Christian Without Going to Church: The Unofficial Guide to Alternative Forms of Christian Community*, Kelly Bean explores the reasons and the channels some have found (or founded) for service, pastoral care, and discipleship. Baker Books

BY DANNY DUNCAN COLLUM

Life, Liberty, and Net Neutrality

Seven words the FCC needs to hear this summer.

THE CONTROVERSY over net neutrality has come back to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) where it began, and the commissioners need to hear, immediately, one simple message from ordinary citizens: "Reclassify broadband internet as a telecommunications service."

You don't really even need to know what those seven words mean. Just say them—by phone, email, fax, or carrier pigeon—until the commissioners get the idea.

That imperative sentence is aimed at preventing a policy shift that could turn our information superhighway into a fast, expensive toll road for the wealthy and force ordinary citizens onto a two-lane frontage road, with lots of traffic lights.

Net neutrality, as you may recall, is the principle that internet service providers—the companies that own the cable or the wireless frequencies that bring the internet to your device—should treat all digital content the same. Comcast shouldn't block Amazon Prime to force you into its own video-on-demand service, and Verizon shouldn't let Netflix pay more to get higher download speeds than its competitors. As a corollary, this means that independent filmmakers and video journalists have the same access to the online audience that the corporate big boys have.

FCC appointees in the first Obama term made net neutrality the rule of the digital roadway, but they did it using a regulatory framework inherited from the Bush II FCC that treated broadband internet as an "information service" rather than a telecommunications service. In January, a U.S. Court of Appeals found that, under the "information services" classification, broadband service companies should be free to contract with content providers for the use of their cables and wireless frequencies. The judges broadly hinted that if the FCC wanted net neutrality, it could simply reclassify broadband service as a utility. The commissioners met to reconsider, and while they talked, Netflix immediately cut deals with both Verizon and Comcast to pay for faster service.

Henrik Jonsson

The legal distinction between an "information service" and a "telecommunications service" is crucial. Telecommunications services are considered public utilities—like landline phone service was when it emerged in the 20th century. Back then the FCC used a combination of regulations, incentives, and subsidies to get phone service extended to practically every household in America and keep the basic service affordable for almost everyone.

Broadband internet has become the kind of necessity that home phone service once was, and that same policy approach is needed. Comcast, AT&T, Verizon, etc. are right when they say that the public demand for streaming video requires new infrastructure. New cable needs to be laid and new wireless frequencies opened up. But who will pay for it? If, as the service providers are demanding, the content companies pay, only corporate content will be seen. If the service providers pay, they will pass the charge on to us, the customers, in our monthly bill. The answer is the same as it once was for telephone service. The service-providing companies must pay for the infrastructure. They charge their customers for it, but the federal government puts in a subsidy to keep the service affordable for lower-income people. That way you get a free marketplace of ideas and relative equality of access; both democracy and social justice are served.

But in its proposal issued this May, the FCC promised to maintain net neutrality while allowing pay-for-play deals on a case-by-case basis. After a storm of public protest, FCC chair Tom Wheeler inserted language into the proposal asking for public and industry input on the question of reclassifying broadband service.

The FCC will hear comments on the issue throughout the summer and take it up again in the fall. Hence the urgent need for that seven-word message. Free Press, a leading media reform advocacy organization, makes it easy for you to raise your voice—visit freepress.net/action. ■

Danny Duncan Collum, *author of the novel* White Boy, *teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort.*

Continued from Page 39

autobiography of an exegete.

So consider: an abusive upbringing and confession of an unreconciled bitter grief over his father's suicide; striking out into the world as a young person to test the unworried radical grace of the Sermon on the Mount; a Pentecostal conversion with tongues and baptism in the Holy Ghost that never let him go; the march in Selma; work (personal and academic) with the Guild for Psychological Studies in California; the complicated relationship to academia; marriage to a partner who would draw his biblical work toward art, dance, embodiment, and healing. These and more—the experience of Harlem, Chile, and South Africa.

One might meditate on the cover photo of *Just Jesus*, where Walter is being arrested in the "daily death toll project" in Washington, D.C., in 1971. He holds a Vietnamese peasant hat and bears a sash identifying him with "a monk." Each day 300 people from different cities on the East Coast would die-in at the White House to represent the body count during the air war. Full disclosure: He was my New Testament professor at the time, and I am lying somewhere on the ground off the edge of the page—my own first arrest.

Years later, as we stood together against another war, blocking the White House gate (an action, if I'm not mistaken, organized by Sojourners), Walter and I talked while the cops summoned the wagons. I was angsting about a book I was attempting to write about the principalities and liturgical resistance. He said firmly, "The powers hate exposure. They are trying to suppress this book, and you can't allow them to." I was fully encouraged. It got me moving and off the dime. I wrote. Only much later did it dawn on me how this wisdom was hard won from his own experience of struggling mightily to unmask the powers. Now I find in *Just Jesus* a journal entry at precisely that time, nearly to that effect: "I am simply eager to get on with the Powers books, yet I am afraid of failure too. I am afraid of not being able to pull it off as a total integrated work of art and thought. That is, of course, possible. But it is also the Devil undermining all chance of it happening as well."

Fully two-thirds of *Collected Readings* is taken up by Wink's trilogy on the

BY GARETH HIGGINS

From HBO's The Normal Heart

SMALL SCREEN, GREAT **DRAMA**

IT'S A TRUISM to say that television is outpacing cinema for entertainment quality and depth of exploration. Since *The Wire* appeared a decade ago, studios have been realizing that there is an audience for long-form storytelling that is willing to think.

Recently I've been struck by the set-in-the-'80s espionage thriller **The Americans,** the deeply haunting police procedural **True Detective,** the hilarious pathos of **Louie** and **Veep,** and the sly, shocking **Hannibal,** a prequel to *The Silence of the Lambs*: All hugely entertaining, dramatically credible, and challenging both as works that require sustained attention and in terms of what they say about life. *The Americans* is really an exploration of marriage and cultural identity wrapped up in Cold War cloaks-and-daggers; *True Detective* is a lament for the broken parts of America, and an affirmation that friendship endures above almost everything else; and *Hannibal* is a postmodern delving into Dante's Inferno, looking at the underbelly of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's assertion that "the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being."

What's most exciting is that it's now considered viable to make drama that actually asks real questions about life and is prepared not to answer them pat. Along with the vast amount of social media conversation about these works, what we have is more akin to ancient forms of public entertainment that required a kind of audience participation—theatrical catharsis meeting gathered conversation to produce a community hermeneutic. When we talk about TV and cinema, we're talking about ourselves.

Which brings me to **The Normal Heart,** HBO's film of Larry Kramer's play about the emergence of AIDs and the work of the Gay Men's Health Crisis in New York City. Adapted by Kramer and directed by *Glee* and *American Horror Story*'s Ryan Murphy, *The Normal Heart* stars Mark Ruffalo as Kramer's surrogate Ned Weeks, more than ably supported by the likes of Matt Bomer, Jim Parsons, Julia Roberts, and Alfred Molina.

It's a film that doesn't fully succeed as a work of television, largely I think because of its stage origins, but it is still a profoundly moving, educative, emotionally truthful piece of work. The film is important because of the tragic history it tells: The Reagan administration, and the mayor of New York, the city where nearly 50 percent of the early cases occurred, refused to acknowledge the AIDs crisis until it was considered "safe" to do so—which surely contributed to more suffering and deaths. *The Normal Heart* should deepen the mainstreaming of anti-homophobic narratives and open up the dominant culture to rethink its—and possibly our—ignorance. It's a sign of cultural maturity that this provocation is channeled through great drama. ■

***Gareth Higgins** is a northern Irish writer living in North Carolina. He co-presents thefilmtalk.com and soultelegram.com.*

principalities: *Naming, Unmasking,* and *Engaging the Powers*, truly his most influential work. His close survey of the New Testament material, the theological essays informed by cultural analysis and depth psychology, and the capstone—a new and renewed practical theology of nonviolence—have become seminal for both biblical studies and movement spirituality. Language that he originated in each, such as "myth of redemptive violence" and "the domination system," has become commonplace—even unacknowledged and ubiquitous.

Henry French roots the impetus for the powers trilogy in Walter and June's lived experience in Chile under military dictatorship in 1982: Nearly crushed by despair; driven to the Word. Elsewhere Wink credits William Stringfellow with setting him in motion on the 30-year principalities and powers project when Wink reviewed *Free In Obedience* (1964), Stringfellow's first real treatment of the powers, for *Christianity and Crisis* magazine. Stringfellow doesn't come up in these volumes.

The strength of *Collected Readings* is also a weakness. That a volume published by Fortress Press should collect readings all from Fortress is a narrow reliance. Primary publisher, yes. Core works, to be sure. But so much omitted. As French himself seems to acknowledge, one may readily imagine a fuller, broader anthology that will one day draw upon Wink's other books (he wrote eight on the powers alone), some more popular and practical, as well as the articles, interviews, accounts of nonviolent action, poems, prayers, and Bible studies. Bring them deftly on.

Wink's work changed the face of biblical studies in ways large and small. Both books include a notable one from the Sermon on the Mount: For more than a millennium, turn the other cheek, give also your coat, and go the extra mile have been read as passive-doormat ethical prescriptions. Wink recovered them as uppity resistance examples. Many were tapped by him to help enact these stories in his local presentations. In *Just Jesus*, he recounts that it was only in performing Jesus' sayings that Wink first understood their meaning. Only in attempting to strike a fellow participant on the right cheek, did it become physically clear this was a backhand of humiliation—the entire sequence being about powerlessness upending power, about reclaiming dignity and humanity. Notice that bodily enactment was key. Incarnation preceded exegesis.

He taught this sequence as training in biblical nonviolence to participants in the South African church struggle against apartheid. His illegal border crossing, practically miraculous, into South Africa with his lifelong friend Richard Deats is told here in fine detail, a story of risk, providence, and resurrection.

Once, as a seminarian at Union, in an "Intro to New Testament" small group circle, we were studying the pearl of great price from Matthew. Walter halted the discussion so we could go round and allow the text to ask us each: "What are you willing to die for?" I am still living with that discipleship question. I've since decided that no one should escape seminary (nor baptismal preparation, for that matter) without having to face that interrogation. It is the human question not just of freedom and mortality, but of risk and struggle.

June reports that it was important to Walter in his illness that he complete the autobiography before he died. She quotes him from an interview, "I hope to live to a ripe old age, but if I have to give my life for the gospel or justice, I hope I can do that." He did, just so, in the many ways that human beings can. The book is witness. Thanks be to God. ■

Turn the other cheek and go the extra mile have been read as passive-doormat ethical prescriptions. Wink recovered them as uppity resistance examples.

Bill Wylie-Kellermann *is a pastor, community activist, teacher, and writer in Detroit. His most recent book is* William Stringfellow: Essential Writings *(Orbis).*

Reviewed by Jennifer Moon

SINS OF **OMISSION**

***Tea Party Catholic: The Catholic Case for Limited Government, a Free Economy, and Human Flourishing*, by Samuel Gregg. The Crossroad Publishing Company.**

WHAT IS THE relationship between one's religious beliefs and one's economic and political views? Are some religious beliefs more "American" than others?

These questions come to mind in reading Samuel Gregg's *Tea Party Catholic: The Catholic Case for Limited Government, a Free Economy, and Human Flourishing.* Gregg suggests that religion directly informs—or should inform—our understanding of political and economic issues and that religious, economic, and political liberty are inextricably bound. A perceived or real "attack" on one, he contends, is an attack on all.

Gregg is director of research for Acton Institute, a libertarian think tank whose core principles seek the "integrating [of] Judeo-Christian truths with free market principles."

In *Tea Party Catholic* Gregg writes of a "new type of Catholic American" who is grounded in a "dynamic sense of orthodoxy" but whose "Americanness" is defined by faith in free market principles. *Tea Party Catholic* details how free market principles and a view of government "with clear but constrained economic functions" have, Gregg argues, not only deep roots in U.S. political history but also in Catholic tradition. Thereby, he suggests, any U.S. Catholic differing in his or her economic and political beliefs has neither a proper understanding of the United States' founding nor of the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Gregg's attempt to sacralize libertarianism is not consistent with Catholic doctrine: It runs counter to stated positions of the Vatican and the majority of Catholic theologians and economists. At a recent conference at The Catholic University of America one of Pope Francis' advisers, Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga, said that in commenting on free market and libertarian influences on our global economy, Pope Francis gave a "sharp prophetic verdict: 'This economy kills.'"

Gregg tries to make the case for his Catholic-libertarian mash-up through the

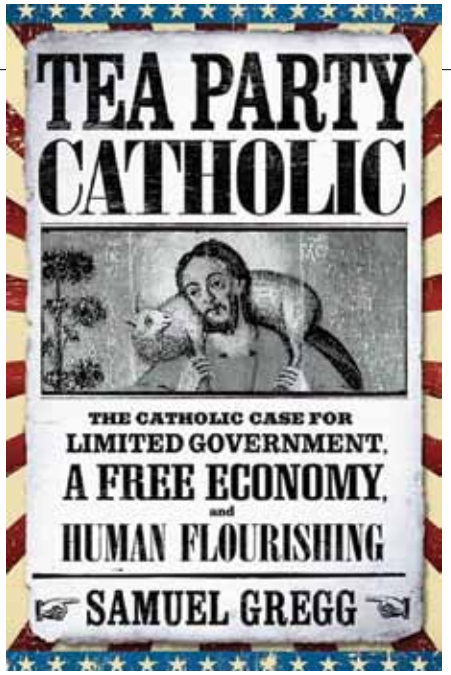


figure of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, the only Catholic signer of the Declaration of Independence. Although Carroll's appearance in the book is surprisingly sporadic and fleeting given the book's introduction, Carroll is meant to connect the dots in Gregg's story between Catholicism, free market economics, and the founding of the U.S.

Tea Party Catholic is meant to be a neatly packaged case for why Catholics, as a matter of faith and as good U.S. citizens, should adhere to free market ideology. In the end, however, it's too neatly packaged, coming off as historically misleading and politically opportunistic.

The book reads much like the Republican Party platform, with each plank hung upon the awkward framework of Catholic teaching and Revolutionary War ideology. Gregg's treatment touches numerous current policy debates, including immigration reform, the Affordable Care Act, monetary policy, budget deficits, the Paul Ryan budget, and unions. Each topic is argued from a free market perspective and draws selectively upon the writings of Catholic theologians.

Tea Party Catholic is argument by omission, whether it is making the case for a free market foundation to Catholic teaching absent countervailing evidence or commenting on early U.S. history. Reading present-day assumptions into the writings and lives of those in the past is always a risky, though currently quite popular, proposition, and it is no less so here. This, ultimately, is Gregg's downfall. Claiming that the Revolutionary War generation, or any one revolutionary in particular, was a paragon of virtue and an exemplar of liberty is to disregard the complexity of the human experience and to misconstrue the past. Nor is it accurate to portray the Revolutionary generation as a unified group of free marketers throwing off the shackles of mercantilism.

The struggle of the founders with slavery is well-known. A look at tariff history and early efforts to protect U.S. manufacturing shows that grievances cited by the colonists in the quest for independence, such as taxation and restrictions on trading, were suddenly not nearly as egregious as they worked to establish a national government.

Charles Carroll, Gregg's champion of liberty, was a prominent Federalist who favored the creation of a strong federal government. He represented Maryland as a senator when the first U.S. Congress overwhelmingly passed the Tariff of 1789 as its first major piece of legislation in an effort to raise revenue and protect U.S. industry. And besides being the only Catholic to sign the Declaration of Independence, Carroll was also the colonies' largest slaveholder.

The past, like the present, belies neat packaging. ■

Jennifer Moon *is a freelance writer in Bellingham, Wash. She holds a Ph.D. in early American history from the University of Virginia.*

Reviewed by Andrew Wilkes

A HANDBOOK FOR **JUSTICE**

***Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World*, by Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Heltzel. IVP Books.**

FAITH-ROOTED *Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World* outlines a theological cartography of social change. In this critical intervention, Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Heltzel reimagine—and as a necessary consequence, rechart—the landscape of vision, action, and strategic planning needed for social change.

Full disclosure: I have attended several trainings conducted by the co-authors. Indeed, the dual authorship of the text is a principal strength. *Faith-Rooted Organizing* blends the voice of an evangelical-activist theologian in Heltzel with the homespun

OIKO CREDIT

Empowering **Women**

Adama Diarra of Soro Yiriwaso, an Oikocredit partner in Mali

With the profit from her ventures, Adama can send her children to school and buy them proper clothing. She says the ability to save and borrow money has allowed her to reinvest in her own business and gain **financial independence**.

Oikocredit invests in women in 67 countries around the world.

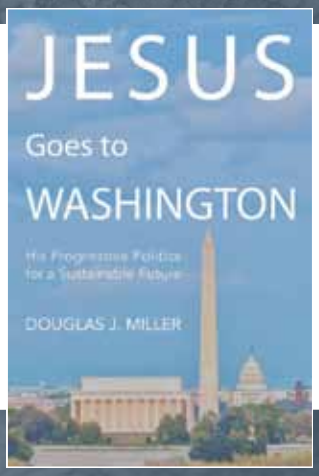
Invest today and help Empower Women!
Minimum investment: $250
Annual Interest: 2%

Learn more:
202.728.4143
usa@oikocredit.org
www.oikocreditusa.org/invest

Investments not available in AL, AZ, AR, CO, GA, IN, NE, NH, OK, PA, PR, TX, WA, WI

HOW WOULD JESUS VOTE?

"I love the way the book makes the case for progressive politics and for ecological responsibility, using the Bible so effectively. I am grateful to have such an informative piece of work in my hands."
Tony Campolo



978-1-62564-042-0 / 226 PP.

ORDERS@WIPFANDSTOCK.COM
TEL. (541) 344-1528
AVAILABLE IN BOOKSTORES

From Sojourners

Bring a heart for creation wherever you go.

- Eco-friendly, 11.5 x 11.5 inches 100% organic cotton
- Fair trade
- Made by women in India freed from the sex trade

Get one now for only $8.95!

Find it in the SojoStore: visit www.sojo.net/greenheart

profundity of a seasoned pastor and campaign organizer in Salvatierra. The authors delight readers with complementary writing styles: Heltzel speaks through theological propositions, interpolated intermittently with jazz references and theological punch lines; Salvatierra communicates through proverbs, organizing anecdotes, poignant biblical passages, and narrative side notes.

The result is a well-argued and accessible text that should resonate from the seminary to the sanctuary. Their driving thesis is that faith communities, especially Christian ones, should organize for social change in a way that is rooted and guided by the stories, symbols, sayings, and scriptures of our faith. *Faith-Rooted Organizing* functions as an instruction manual on effective advocacy while providing a theological rationale and vocabulary for a vocation marked by tremendous victories and colossal failures, breakthrough partnerships and fragmented coalitions, glimpses of beloved community and portraits of democracy stillborn.

These strengths notwithstanding, some themes of the book could be deepened. The text assumes—but does not explicitly argue for—the policies of an interventionist state, the countervailing power of labor unions, and a civic culture responsive to political pressure, principled argument, or both. Much of the audience of *Faith-Rooted Organizing*, presumably, shares this social vision, but the unconvinced need to hear core premises stated and defended. Moreover, even the proverbial choir needs to hear preaching that explains as well as emphasizes the magic of dearly held melodies.

Additionally, given the ecumenical and egalitarian aims of the faith-rooted organizing project, offering a rigorous defense of self-governance and democracy would augment the text. Gary Dorrien notes that the book draws upon a sociological theory of change called resource mobilization theory. That theory, in essence, contends that preferred futures can be established when resources such as money, labor, capital, and so on are organized in a particular direction for a particular end. Heltzel and Salvatierra assemble an impressive array of anecdotes and "movement stories" to demonstrate the local and regional effectiveness of this strategy.

There is, however, a big picture question that confronts the reader—to whom do we assign responsibility for implementing justice? Is the principal duty of the church and community-based groups concerning justice to call the state to a higher vision of the common good (enforcing rights, implementing social insurance and social service programs, mandating fair housing and wages, etc.)? Or might we expand our ecclesiology of justice and claim with Ron Sider that the first society that must be just is the church? If we pursue the latter claim, which appears to be the direction in which Heltzel and Salvatierra point, then *Faith-Rooted Organizing* finally aims toward a renewed church that blesses the world so that all its peoples might see a day where justice and peace embrace in our cities, countryside, communities—in all creation. ■

Andrew Wilkes *is co-minister to young adults and social justice ministry director at the Greater Allen AME Cathedral of New York and a Sandy Recovery grants manager at American Red Cross Greater New York.*

Reviewed by Rosalie G. Riegle

A REIGN OF **TERROR**

***Thermonuclear Monarchy: Choosing Between Democracy and Doom*, by Elaine Scarry. W.W. Norton and Company.**

AMID WORRIES about a new Cold War, of standoffs with old enemies and confrontations with new ones, Harvard professor Elaine Scarry's latest book is a chilling reminder of the doom our presidentially controlled nuclear arsenal can unleash upon the world. Early on, she reminds us that President Nixon told reporters, "I can get on the telephone and in 25 minutes 70 million people will be dead."

This boast illustrates Scarry's thesis: We live in a thermonuclear monarchy, where one person—the U.S. president—can destroy the world. Nuclear doom is an accident waiting to happen, and she reviews a number of barely publicized near misses.

But she sees a solution at hand—the U.S. Constitution, specifically both Article I, Section 8, which says that Congress alone can declare war, and the Second Amendment. The text of the latter reads: *"A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state*, the right of the

people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed." (Emphasis added.) Scarry argues that the amendment mandates a second level of citizen consent to war, a further brake to executive power, even after Congress has given its approval—that the writers of the Constitution intended that before the U.S. engaged in any war the people would have to consent to join a militia, a form of collective participation in the decision for war. According to Scarry, our out-of-ratio nuclear weapons stockpile, ready to launch at the command of a single person, has negated the Constitution-mandated chain of accountability and decision-making and is therefore illegal.

DOD photo

A U.S. Titan missile in its silo.

Scarry, a scholar of social theory, argues that the social contract on which the Constitution stands also outlaws nuclear weapons. Departing from some interpretations, she maintains that the social contract as developed through the centuries is actually a covenant for peace, giving us a blueprint on how to live without war.

Except for the faithful Plowshares anti-nuclear activists, most of "we the people" no longer think about nuclear war. Perhaps it's because we simply can't think of it, can't get our heads around the idea that one person can input the codes that will kill every one of us, friend or foe. Scarry forces us to face the realities. For example, she writes that each U.S. Navy Ohio-class nuclear submarine carries enough warheads to destroy the people on an entire continent. We have 14 of them and seven continents. Do the math.

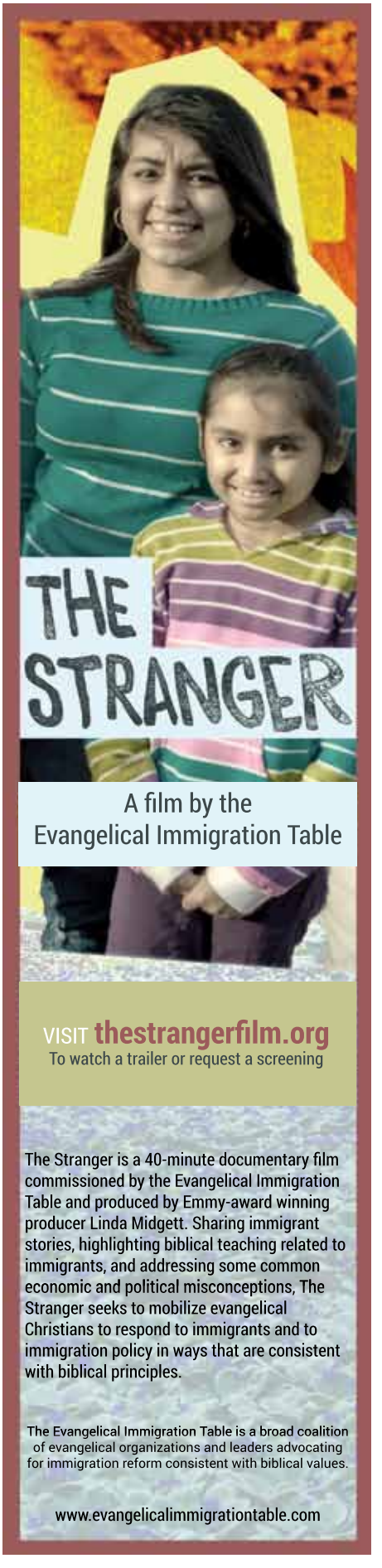
Every foreign affairs correspondent and every federal elected official should read this book. Lest informed readers be put off by its size and depth of reasoning, an introduction illustrates the problem with a graphic parable, and each part begins with a helpful prelude and summary.

Scarry also provides fascinating detail in developing each of her arguments. In the final section, "Consent and Emergency Deliberation," we learn that Switzerland provides nuclear shelter for 81 percent of its population. The U.S. provides it only for the executive office, which will dive deep into a Blue Ridge mountain in the event of a nuclear strike. But while regular exercises rehearse the steps necessary to alert the president to launch a strike, the president's evacuation travel is rarely practiced, probably because such a maneuver would attract attention. And attention to the fact of thermonuclear monarchy is exactly what the president and the Pentagon don't want. We might start to ask why the government, instead of building shelters for its people, posts billboards: "Does your family have a plan? Be prepared for an emergency!"

We live in a thermonuclear monarchy, where one person—the U.S. president—can destroy the world.

Scarry concludes that our Constitution is the adequate but woefully unused answer to eliminating nuclear weapons. One caveat about the book: Scarry doesn't tell us how to get from the doom to the democracy. Given our present muddled Congress—relying as it does on constant, costly electioneering and stunted with corporate financial control—how can we get our representatives to listen? Scarry writes, "Thermonuclear monarchy is more grave, more dark, more dangerous than any tyranny that has ever operated on earth." Eliminating the weapons completely is the only solution. If the Constitution is an answer, how can we get Congress to use it? ■

Rosalie G. Riegle *is professor emerita in English from Saginaw Valley State University and on the national committee of the War Resisters League. Her latest book is* Crossing the Line: Nonviolent Resisters Speak Out for Peace *(Wipf and Stock).*



BY BILL McKIBBEN

The Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon in Iceland.

Gene Wahlich

Time for Confession—and Action

THE NEWS IN mid-May was grim: Scientists announced that melt across the West Antarctic was proceeding much faster than before. In fact, they said that at this point the melt of the six great glaciers fronting Amundsen Bay was "unstoppable," and that over a number of decades it would raise sea levels by 10 feet or more.

This is another way of saying: Given dominion over the earth, we've failed. We've taken one after another of the planet's great physical features and wrecked them. The Arctic? Summer sea ice is reduced by 80 percent, and it's an every-year affair now to boat through the Northwest Passage, impassably choked by ice until this millennium began. The seven seas? Thirty percent more acidic than they were in the past—and the acidity could double or triple by the end of the century. The Antarctic? It's not just warming rapidly, but its wind patterns have been changed by the ozone hole in ways that amplify the heating. Storms are stormier, droughts are deeper, fires last longer, rain falls harder.

> We stood by as our addiction to fossil fuel ran Genesis in reverse.

And all because it was a little easier and a little cheaper not to change off fossil fuels. When scientists sounded the alarm about all this in the late 1980s, the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide was about 350 parts per million—or what we now consider the upper bound of safety. If we'd heeded their fervent warnings, we'd have moved with great speed to convert to solar and wind power. We'd have parked our SUVs. We'd have insulated every home in the world. It would have cost money and it would have been inconvenient; on the other hand, it could have bred solidarity in much the same way that preparing for World War II transformed the U.S.

But we couldn't be bothered. We ignored the first commandant that we'd been given: to exercise sensible, sane stewardship over this planet that God had found so good. We stood by as our addiction to fossil fuel ran Genesis in reverse.

Now—with CO_2 levels averaging above 400 parts per million—it's too late to prevent much tragedy. The seas are already rising, and they're going to rise some more. The floods are already coming, and they'll grow more intense. No need to listen to the theologians describe free will: We can see it in the daily weather forecast, with its ever greater number of record highs. Our character is revealed in every cubic meter of the atmosphere.

Which means that for those of us who are Christians, there's a need both for confession and for action. We waited very long to get started—but that's no excuse for not starting now. We've made our task harder, which means we must work harder.

Because if we don't break the power of the fossil fuel industry right now, that 10 feet of sea level rise will become 30 or 40; that 2 degrees Celsius climb in temperature will become four or six or eight; that miserable century or two will become an impossible one. That's why it's good news that more and more congregations and dioceses and synods and general conferences are divesting from fossil fuel stocks: As Desmond Tutu made clear this spring, it is the single greatest moral imperative of our moment. It's not sufficient, but it's necessary.

Having screwed up, we could compound that failure by saying, "It's too late." That would take our inaction and turn it into an excuse for never acting. It's too late to keep bad things from happening. But it's not too late to keep worse things from happening. Realizing that requires maturity, which is what we're called to. ■

Bill McKibben *is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont and founder of 350.org. Join the People's Climate March, Sept. 20-21, New York City.*

BY BRIAN DOYLE

A Million Prayers

The first time we visited my sister in her monastery
Was just after one of our sons had survived massive
Surgeries, before and during which all the monks &
Nuns in the monastery, not to mention thousands of
Other generous souls, had prayed constantly for him;
And it turned out that they had gone over the million
Prayer mark for our son, which, according to the law
Of the monastery, gave him lifetime privileges. He's
No dolt, this kid, and he took off running, to hammer
On drums, and eat the cookies on an altar, and pursue
The grim local peacocks, who were deeply aggrieved.
By the time we retrieved him he was worn and happy
And the peacocks were huddled bitterly in the maples.
Even now I sometimes wonder if he will end up there
In his golden years, maybe retiring there at age ninety
And serving as the soul who calls everyone to prayer;
He did exactly that when he was a small boy, after all.

Brian Doyle *is the editor of* Portland Magazine *at the University of Portland (Oregon) and the author most recently of* The Thorny Grace of It, *a collection of spiritual essays.*

Photo by Images Etc Ltd

BY MIN-AH CHO

Who Do You Say I Am?

AS A NATIVE KOREAN who has studied and taught in the U.S. for more than 13 years, I feel like I'm always swinging between two lands—neither giving me a sense of home. Nostalgia might be too gentle a word to describe this in-between space. Rather, it's a bitter and unpleasant reality constantly reminding me that to some I appear "strange," "irregular," "awkward," "unskillful," or "suspicious." In this situation, I remain "unnatural."

I often feel the same way in the church. My ethnicity and gender are considered marks of "otherness"—even in my own denomination. Every waking moment I wrestle with this question: How can I incorporate my body, my culture, my language as a Korean woman theologian fully into the body of Christ? This wrestling, while uncomfortable, also prevents me from settling with easy or convenient answers. Perpetual dislocation leads me to pay attention to the unseen and unheard corners of the world. It demands I examine old convictions and construct a creative space for new ways of thinking about God, life, and the nature of justice and hope.

The majority of our biblical stories come from people who were also living outside their own land. They too were in some way dislocated. The biblical texts this month call particular attention to their emotions, tensions, and challenges. They invite all of us to feel lost with them, to tremble with them, and to be courageous with them.

***Min-Ah Cho** is assistant professor of theology and spirituality at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minn.*

[AUGUST 3]

Attention and Generosity

Isaiah 55:1-5; Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21

DURING THE Babylonian exile (598 to 538 BCE), the Jews in the land of Judah were deported to Babylonia. In Isaiah 55, the prophet helps the jaded Israelites imagine the world where God invites them to live, the world where bread, wine, milk, and water are free. But how can they respond to God's call? The answer is provided in verse 2—if only the Israelites will "Listen carefully to me," God cries. Attention is necessary in order to accept God's invitation.

Matthew's story of feeding the 5,000, too, demonstrates how our focused attention can be a way to answer God's call. The crowds heard Jesus and they followed him. Their attention to him moved Jesus. With compassion, Jesus cured their sick and fed them. Matthew sees the occasion as a sign of the kingdom already present, inchoative, in Jesus and in the crowds' attention to Jesus.

Attention is not without effort, however. French philosopher and political activist Simone Weil says, "Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity." Weil also believes that attention is necessary both to know God and to respond to the need of our neighbors, which cannot be separated from one another. The capacity to give one's attention to others is difficult and requires discipline. It requires making room for others even though we live in a culture filled with endless distractions and selfish pursuits. Attention to another, in our scenario, is almost a miracle. And Matthew's story tells us that, indeed, it is a miracle.

[AUGUST 10]

The Given Moment

1 Kings 19:9-18; Psalm 85:8-13; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33

IN MATTHEW 14:22-33, the disciples fear Jesus walking toward them on the water, thinking him a "ghost" (verse 26). Peter seems intent on verifying Jesus' identity. Jesus obliges, yet he requires Peter to be attentive to the moment. When Peter's attention fails, he sinks. But his clumsiness is understandable. Jesus is standing on the windy, wavering water. The object of attention—truth—is not immovable. It is not a fixed object in dualistic opposition to the giver (God) and the receiver (the believer).

We often expect that God's truth is revealed with obvious and decisive signs. The more startling and unusual they are, the more one must trust they are the message of God. Simple-minded theology attributes natural disaster to divine vindictiveness. Elijah's story (1 Kings 19), however, challenges our expectation of such definitions of truth. Whereas Elijah anticipates God appearing in dramatic and unmistakable fashions, like "a great wind," "earthquake," or "fire," God talks to him with "a sound of sheer silence" (verses 11-12).

God's truth is barely perceptible and understandable because it is not an object to comprehend. God's truth is attainable, but it has a way of eluding those who set out to grasp and dominate it by themselves. Instead, God's truth is to be lived out by engaging and working with people, as these texts demonstrate—Jesus gets into the boat with the disciples; God sends Elijah to Damascus to meet with people and work with them. Only a receptive and empathetic person, paying attention in the sheer silence, can discover the truth and bear witness to it.

[AUGUST 17]

A Woman's Courage

Isaiah 56:1, 6-8; Psalm 67; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15:10-28

THE CANAANITE woman in Matthew 15:21-28 leaves her native land desperately seeking a cure for her daughter. Like other women who approach Jesus, she is not under the authority or protection of a husband. She could be any migrant woman, perhaps a single mom trying to survive in a foreign country without legal status.

Jesus, on the contrary, here represents the side of the powerful. Though his land is under Roman occupation, Jesus is with his disciples, has male privileges, and has taught people with authority. His disciples think that Jesus' blessing should be granted only to Jews. They ask Jesus to send her away. Are they afraid of losing entitlements? Jesus appears to agree with them.

But she cries out for Jesus' attention, unexpectedly speaking the language of Israel, not her native tongue: "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a

demon" (verse 22). Jesus ignores her at first—then appears to reject her. But she does not give up. She is strong and insistent. She does not accept that there is a boundary between insiders and outsiders in Jesus' mission.

She overcomes Jesus' refusal by challenging him to reflect on his own conviction. "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table" (verse 27). Jesus humbly accepts her challenge. He opens his mind to this outsider, to the new vision for the kingdom of God in accordance with the vision in Isaiah 56. God will gather others together, besides those already gathered, saying, "my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (verse 7).

[AUGUST 24]

Claiming Identity

Isaiah 51:1-6; Psalm 138; Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20

NEW TESTAMENT scholar Elaine M. Wainwright points out a dangerous dialogue pattern in Matthew 16, when Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" (verse 15). When we read the text in a broader context, it could be argued that Peter's answer—"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God"—is simply acknowledging a characterization of Jesus popular in the Matthean communities. Yet Peter's confession on behalf of all the disciples, in effect, silences them. Further, in a community with strong female leadership, Peter's confession genderizes power as male normative—all the male and female participants of God's kingdom are represented by the male disciple Peter, with subsequent consequences throughout Christianity.

If we focus on Jesus' question, not Peter's answer, then the dialogue renders the question about Jesus' identity open and tense. It allows room for "creative meaning-making." Instead of affirming Peter's authority, the question invites all of us—regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, and class—to ponder the relationship between Jesus and ourselves: "Who do you say I am?"

The church has a role to play in such creative meaning-making as translator, connector, and negotiator, by giving particular attention to the voices of the powerless. Attention does not happen when we are accustomed to answers that have been considered correct and universal. Attention does not happen without practice. Jesus' question requires experimental attempts to create space for seeing and thinking independent of dominant patterns.

[AUGUST 31]

Idolatrous Suffering

Jeremiah 15:15-21; Psalm 26:1-8; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28

THE FIRST OF THREE Passion predictions in Matthew starts here in verse 21. Jesus warns his disciples that he must "undergo great suffering ... and be killed" before rising from the dead. The announcement of Jesus' suffering and death are closely tied to what it means to follow Jesus as a disciple.

Jesus' redemptive suffering evokes a fundamental discomfort for Christians. It also deeply affects our relationship with God. For some it enriches life and reveals a depth of courage born of love and compassion. For others, it can become an instrument of oppression that justifies patterns of violence by sacralizing unjust abuse as somehow beneficial.

The Passion narratives address the historical facts of unjust oppression. They reveal a frank description of our human condition—our collective violence and persecution against the innocent. They by no means suggest that God wants more effective and nicer victims to "forgive" greater sinners. As S. Mark Heim says, "The Passion narratives follow the script of sacrifice as diagnosis, not as prescription."

Jesus experienced extreme forms of dehumanization through his suffering and crucifixion. We must first pause and witness that horrible violence, lest we rush expeditiously to his "sacrificial generosity." Jesus' suffering teaches us neither to worship such dehumanization nor to perpetuate it. It impels us to stop it. His resurrection declares that this is possible. When we only worship his suffering, then suffering becomes idolatry. Thus Paul urges us, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). ■

"Preaching the Word," *Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.*

Living School *for* Action *and* Contemplation

Study and practice to deepen awareness of union with God.

Live out your soul task in service to the world.

Two-year program combining onsite and online learning with master teachers including Richard Rohr, Cynthia Bourgeault, and James Finley

Explore and apply at
cac.org/rohr-inst
(Application deadline for the 2015-2017 program: September 30, 2014)

NEEDED

peacemakers, teachers
engineers, administrators
agriculturists, leaders
support staff, nutritionists
community workers
and more ...

Find current opportunities
serve.mcc.org
Mennonite Central Committee

FUNNY BUSINESS BY ED SPIVEY JR.

Ken Davis

A License to Pray

THE RECENT Supreme Court ruling permitting prayer at government functions holds many ramifications for our day-to-day life, such as getting a comfortable seat at the city council meeting before the clerk starts reading the entire book of Revelation.

In writing for the majority, Justice Anthony M. Kennedy held that public prayer is "deeply embedded in the history and tradition of this country" and should be permitted as a ceremonial practice. Like, maybe at the D.C. Department of Motor Vehicles:

"Please report to Window #12. And bring your Bible."

Driver: I'm here to renew my driver's license.

DMV clerk: Let us pray.

Driver: Excuse me?

DMV clerk: With every head bowed, and every eye closed, we pray to the Lord Jesus Christ that his love will pour out on this driver, and by the grace of the Living God, he will always come to a complete stop, when appropriate.

Driver: Amen, I guess. Now, will I need to take a new photo?

DMV clerk: God knows who you are and what you look like. Because, his eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches you.

Driver: You're going to sing, aren't you?

DMV clerk: I sing because I'm happy, I sing because I'm free, for his eye is ...

Driver: Got it. God is always watching me.

DMV clerk: And we have several traffic cameras throughout the city to help God in that regard.

Driver: Be that as it may, do I have to do anything else to renew my license?

DMV clerk: Are you washed in the Blood of the Lamb?

Driver: Um, I'm not sure. I showered this morning, but ...

DMV clerk: We'll let it go this time. Okay, that'll be $47.

Driver: That's a lot higher than last year.

DMV clerk: I added 10 percent as a tithe to the church of your choice. Now, which style of license do you prefer: the Ten Commandments or Nativity scene?

Driver: Surprise me.

DMV clerk: You look like you need a good dose of the Old Testament today, so let's go with that. And here are some tracts about the afterlife I think you'll enjoy.

Driver: Should you be doing this? The Supreme Court ruled in favor of prayer at public proceedings, but I don't think you're supposed to proselytize.

DMV clerk: Sir, these materials are nondenominational and nonsectarian so that, whatever religious expression you choose, you will have all the information you need to develop a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Driver: That's sounds suspiciously like the Great Commission.

DMV clerk: We like to call it the D.C. Vehicular Code, praise the Lord.

Driver: But when Justice Kennedy wrote the majority decision he was talking about a limited use of prayer at public gatherings, not spreading the gospel.

DMV clerk: Kennedy is an old Irish Catholic name, isn't it? Must be a good man. Not like those Jewish ladies on the court. You know, Ginsberg, Kagan, Goldameir.

Driver: That's Sotomayor. And she's Roman Catholic.

DMV clerk: Ah, a good Irish girl.

Driver: No, she's Latina. By the way, the guy behind me?

DMV clerk: Yes?

Driver: I think he's Muslim.

DMV clerk: Oh, *goodie*. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. *is art director of* Sojourners.

Meet the SUSTAINERS CIRCLE

SOJOURNERS MONTHLY GIVING CLUB

Sophia Har and Rebecca Kraybill

Roommates. Interns. Friends. Sustainers.

WE ARE PLEASED to introduce two of our newest Sustainers, Sophia Har and Rebecca Kraybill! Hailing from the Twin Cities, Minn., and Lancaster, Pa., respectively, these two met last September when they moved to Washington, D.C., to join the Sojourners intern program. They share a room in the intern house and a cubicle at the office, where Sophia is advertising assistant and Rebecca is editorial assistant.

A few months into their internship, they both joined the Sustainers Circle, giving back not only to the organization but also to the people they have come to know and love during their time here.

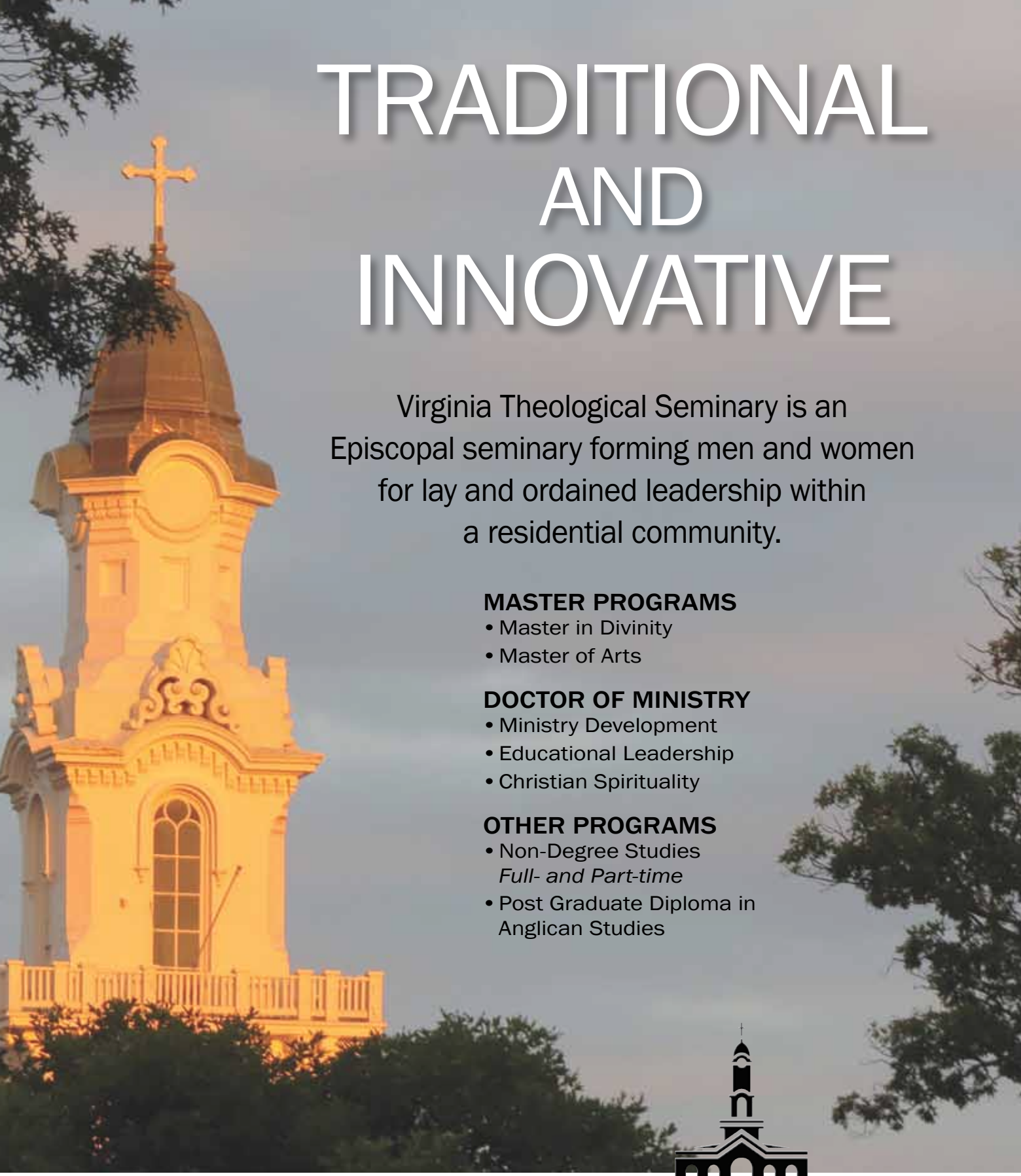
"Sojourners asks questions that make people uncomfortable," Sophia explains. "Discomfort is the seed for growth, and Sojourners serves as a resource to nourish discomfort into compassion and compassion into action." Rebecca adds, "It has been amazing to see how the messages of the magazine encourage people who were about to give up on the idea of faith inspiring action for social change. I am encouraged by the way Sojourners presents a more hopeful perspective on politics as an arena for justice and healing."

Sophia and Rebecca are excited to have this opportunity to share in the work of Sojourners and to live with and learn from one another. Thank you, Sophia and Rebecca, for all the ways you have given to the movement for peace and justice!

Lydia Kang

Join Sophia and Rebecca and become a Sustainer today!

Call
1-800-714-7474
and ask for "donor relations,"
or visit sojo.net/monthly.



TRADITIONAL AND INNOVATIVE

Virginia Theological Seminary is an Episcopal seminary forming men and women for lay and ordained leadership within a residential community.

MASTER PROGRAMS
- Master in Divinity
- Master of Arts

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY
- Ministry Development
- Educational Leadership
- Christian Spirituality

OTHER PROGRAMS
- Non-Degree Studies
  Full- and Part-time
- Post Graduate Diploma in Anglican Studies

3737 Seminary Road • Alexandria, Va. 22304
703-370-6600
or toll free at 1-800-941-0083

VIRGINIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

www.vts.edu